

PAGANY

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THE MIRACLE

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The house sat low on the prairie. The other houses were dark, but the light from that small shack could be seen for many miles. A man in a Ford coming down the mountains saw it and surmised he must be about four miles from Folsom. Mrs Pfaffer got up and looked out the window through the wide darkness that lay between her house and the Livingstons, "Someone must be sick," she said peering. "Come to bed," said her husband, but she stood shivering slightly, watching the tiny ray of light falling from the lonely window, over the darkness, from the shack that sat so low on the night black earth.

In that house a child was dying. The doctor stood beside the bed, "I've come too late," he said, "Diphtheria."

"Too late," the mother said, "Oh no."

He looked at her, a strange woman to find in a shack on a chicken ranch. He could see she had once had extreme beauty. She spoke with an English accent. Yes—English. She was small with red hair now turning grey and her small English face when young must have held unearthly beauty. Now it was still delicate but with mark of suffering traced upon it. It was dried and withered a little but with that astonishing mark of beauty that would equally astonish men a thousand years hence unearthing her bones.

Now she stood wringing her hands a little beside the bed of the child, looking down on the doomed face and the lost body.

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The girl child was perhaps three with black hair, her mother's delicacy of feature but added to it a strange wildness, a boldness that the new world faces are apt to have.

The father stood at the foot of the bed looking not at the child but at the mother. He was an American and his face unfamiliar now with sorrow looked with a crazy anxiety at his wife's face bent over the dying child.

Her head moved slowly as if marking something off, and the doctor saw that she was watching and marking the slow torturous breathing of the child. Her head lifted with the lift of the child's breathing, and she held her hand upward suspended until the breath was expelled and then she held her breath in the moment of awful suspense until the slow intake of breath came again. She seemed to be forcing that intake of breath by her very will. Her pale face was set and intent bending over the child and her hands were tensed.

"Breathe," she whispered and the child seemed to obey her but the doctor, holding the wrist, knew the feeble beat of the pulse, and how slowly the life ebbed as if the child were encased in some awful vacuum and they stood without, watching it suffocate.

He laid the wrist and hand down upon the coverlet. The woman lifted her great eyes in terror.

"You better come away, Ellen," the husband said suddenly in terror too, seeing the doctor lay the hand down and turn away. "Come away, Ellen," he said suddenly in a loud voice, looking at his huge hands that clenched the bed. But the woman did not move, so he came awkwardly to her and plucked her sleeve and then took hold of her arm, thinking to take her out of the room, but with sudden force she pulled away from him.

"Leave me be," she said between her teeth with great force so that both the men in the room lifted their heads sharply. She said again looking straight at her husband, "Leave me alone," and there was such an extraordinary and terrible effect of hatred in her eyes and in the words clenched between her teeth that the man fell back away from her as if she had lifted her hand and had struck him.

She forgot about the two men in the room and looked down at the child, seeing how it had been brought to her for the first time, after a day and a night of racking pain; she saw the round upcurled feet, the bruised head, the blind outgroping hands, the blind and groping mouth. She had waited all the years of her life for that child; and it had not been born until she had given it up, thinking herself then past the time

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of bearing. Then, out of despair came the wonder, the sign, the child. And after the wonder, wonder all her days, every moment, every hour, every span of time; to stoop, to rise, to market, to cook, all one's ways made fertile because a child was growing in time and space to maturity, was growing apace, round upon round of flesh, and at last wonder of wonders, intelligence budding from the glamorous eyes, words from the lips, so that it had seemed that fecund life was forever triumphant and death conquered and decay forbidden. . . .

And now it was all to be stricken down in the night, the fair begotten flesh laid low, the bright intelligence cut down, the new springing words falling back into darkness forever. What now could the world mean with no lips asking what is this and this and this? And why? And what? And where? How could the morning come now and no cry in the house and no prancing feet upon the floor? How could the goats be fed and the cow brought from the pasture? How could the spring flowers come now from the ground? And the rain fall from the sky unwrapped from thunder?

She stood looking down at the face of the strange child that had come mysteriously and now as mysteriously was stricken down.

The mouth was parted now.

The doctor touched the woman and she started like a frightened bird and trembled.

"She's gone."

The woman drew away, sharply frowning. She looked blankly at the doctor not seeing him, horror not yet born in those unnaturally opened eyes. Then she leaned over the child and pushed the hair back from the rounding forehead.

"Breathe," she whispered, "Breathe, my sweet." Then some communication of death came into her hands and she gave a little sharp cry like a bird falling from the sky and turned and ran fluttering around the room beating against the walls. Her husband put out his red hands for her but she avoided them.

"Easy. Easy, Ellen," he said holding his huge hands out but not coming near her.

She fluttered against the rough walls through which the wind blew. She lifted her hands aimlessly to her face. She ran in little jerking runs around the room, around the bed. The doctor put out his hands but he seemed to be shielding himself from the sight of her. She stopped beside the child, bending her face over so that the tears dropped on the chilling flesh.

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"Who'll look after her?" she said in a low voice to the doctor as if settling a practical problem, "Of course you know I've done everything for her since she was born. I don't know who will take care of her now . . . She has to be taken care of"

"You better lie down," said the doctor.

But the woman was excited by her grief as if the child were going on a long journey for which she must prepare it. . .

"She's got to have her new coat," she said brightly, still with the practical tone, "I'm making her a new coat out of one of John's. It's real nice . . ." Her delicate English accent sounded so strange in the shack. The doctor looked at her and decided it was best to leave her alone. He was gathering up his things putting them in his black bag.

Then suddenly the woman gave a long cry and ran out of the door, through the other room and they heard her run out of the house, leaving it silent.

"What shall I do?" said her husband. Then suddenly he ran after her and the doctor didn't know whether he had gone out or was only standing at the door. He listened and could hear nothing. He looked at the child on the bed and then finished packing his bag. He put on his coat, looked about the deserted room and went out. The husband was standing in the door looking out on the dark plains lying under the vast stars, and far on the horizon stood the mountains, a denser rising of the dense black earth beneath the luminous stars. He stood, his large hands hanging at his sides.

The doctor stood behind him buttoning his coat, "She'll come back all right," he said "You better stay here. The air will do her good. Be easy with her. These things go pretty hard with a woman. And she's not young and won't be likely to have another."

The man hung his head as if it was his fault, "She's forty," he said.

"Well, that's pretty old for that kind of thing," the doctor said, "Goodnight. I'll send someone from town. I'll take care of that for you. Goodnight. Goodnight." The man did not move and he had to edge by him; and it somehow made the doctor uncomfortable to have to edge so close to the huge man standing there so dumb, in such mute suffering. "Damn it," he swore banging the door of his car, "I did everything I could." He drove out, viciously jamming the brakes. Jogging over the bad rough roads and driving through the darkness he felt suddenly rather sick and faint and he could think of nothing he had eaten that might disagree with him.

The husband, standing in the door, saw the lights of the doctor's

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car shine on the chicken houses, the goat shed, and the goats moved uneasily and the man knew painfully that they were the dead child's goats and painfully in his mind he conjured the picture of her playing with them, standing solemnly to see them milked. But the picture was dim and he could not bear the pain of limning it brighter. The doctor's car rattled away in the darkness.

He stood in the deep stillness peering out into the thick darkness for Ellen, and he imagined he saw her running in the fields where the wheat was just beginning to sprout; he thought he saw her in the pasture among the oaks making the beasts stir uneasily; or there she was going down the point of road towards the mountains; but he knew that he saw her nowhere, that she was strange to him and that he never saw her even when she stood before him talking of the price of eggs, or setting his meals upon the table as she had done so many times since the far year he had taken her to wife, when he had been afraid of the quick laughter and the gold hair piled over her frail lively face, and she was as the far stars to him, beyond his ken of understanding. She was darkness and nowhere for him and now she had run away and left him awkward with grief, without tongue, and without gesture.

What a way of sorrow to run away, to find the feet quick for running and the breath fast. For he stood rooted forever with his hands a weight hanging in life, his feet a clay rooted in earth, his tongue of like thickness articulating nothing, dead at the quick, frozen at the source, as if he had partaken in his mouth of death.

The madness of silence, of the vast earth lying dumb giving no answer, of the question forever asked of the black rising earth and the faintly shining stars and the stars and the earth forever without answer, this madness touched him too, standing under the vast vault, upright on the mute, mute earth that held death for them all . . . and he started running over the plowed fields and shouting, "Ellen, Ellen!" and he fell stumbling over the clogs, his face thrust in the damp earth so he tasted it in his mouth, having the black stuff in his mouth so he choked with rage and blindness.

He got up and stumbled on, holding his clenched hands, his head down as if he were butting through darkness.

"Ellen, Ellen," he called and he cursed, stopping and shouting curses to the sky and once he stopped and looking back over the knoll he saw the light burning in the shack that seemed to be on another star, and standing in rage and impotence it was borne in upon him that that was his shack he had built with his own hands and that within it lay dead

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his own child that he had builded in darkness beyond him and now lost in darkness still beyond. The frail house on the black night earth seemed so mortal a thing with its faint flickering light that with sorrow, dumb and foreboding, he sank down shivering and weeping.

Ellen coming across the dark fields, distraught like a delicate mad woman, wringing her hands now in silence, treading the black earth that would hold her child, came upon him crouched on the earth sobbing, his great flanks and shoulders lifted by the convulsions that shook him and she stopped and drew back at first, then seeing the familiar arms and the bent head she drew near in wonder seeing him so moved who scarcely ever had voice for joy or sorrow. Now she stood above him in wonder looking down upon him who seemed a part of earth, and she did not know what to do.

No word had been articulated by him for her, neither at the birth of the child, before nor after, and now for him to be broken open by these terrific sobs, to heave like the earth in awful volcanic convulsions, was terrible.

She was going to move on but just then he clutched her skirts, trying to lift himself to her, and in wonder she put her hands upon his stubborn head and let his great hands touch her that had always been strange to her. And in sorrow she knew him.

She stood murmuring, her hands on his head; and he was lifted to his knees, his arms around her, pressing against her thighs and she felt the awful weight of him against her so she could hardly stand. It was like a black wind pushing her and she stood braced holding him.

The frail light from the shack flickered in the draft of the door that had been left open and she stood weeping, stroking his great head.

2.

After that, the neighbors looking out of their windows or rising from the milking of a cow, from hoeing of the garden, would see far off, a slight graceful figure walking over the fields as if hasting to some meeting. Over the fields they saw her, or going through the grove, and now the animals did not rear and start at her coming but lay placidly looking up at her, or, at most, rising and loping gently along behind her as if for company.

Sometimes they met her on the road and she would stop, speaking brightly to them and it was an observant one indeed who detected in the gay speech a brilliance unnatural, a gaiety that might have held a

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shade of madness. But what frightened them most and seemed more than passing unnatural was what she spoke of. Try as they might, never could they steer the conversation in any other channel. So that they came to avoid her like a plague and were so embarrassed when, meeting her face to face, they were forced to have speech with her. For always, in fair weather and foul she had but one topic of conversation, but one theme, one song, one opus; and that was concerning the dead child.

Now it is a law written or unwritten that the dead shall not be spoken of by the living, at least not freely, not pleasantly, not as if they still were in the land of the living, not on equal terms at least. For they are forever separated by mystery, and time and despair. And the living must live and cannot be forever haunted by the dead. So at least is the reasoning of humanity, and a good reason it is, too, for it is a wonder that with death, being in such close juxtaposition with life, so imminent, so disastrous, life is possible at all.

And it was something akin to madness in Ellen Livingston that made her want to clasp the memory of death to herself, and walk the fields brightly, day and night, holding to the memory of her dead child, keeping it among the living by force of her own power, thrusting it up into the bright living world from the shades of the dead, defying decay and despair, recreating life by that force and impulsion of the imagination, by that naked vigor of the living imagination which is the wonder of man.

By some ancient vigor she was able to stand the close alchemy of death and not thrust it away to be forgotten, to be embalmed in a faulty memory. The child had been the very summit and peak of life to her and the memory was more of living than the dun reality of most of life.

She walked in the fields, along the path of the sun, warming herself like the wheat which rose from the soil each day and now stood two feet high. When the child died it was just coming in green juts from the ground. She dreaded to see the season go, the wheat harvested, for it seemed to augur the passing somehow of that vividness when the year would roll so far around that she could no longer count back and say,—“A year ago today it was. A year ago and I had to let down her dresses,—a year ago and she asked me where the thunder was . . .”

She stepped along the road picking the flowers, pulling up the tiny blue flowers that grew close to the ground. They were warm as she touched them and it comforted her to know that things coming from the dark ground could be warm.

She talked to the child telling it about the wheat, how it was coming

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from the ground and how she had not forgotten anything although the wheat now grew two feet upward.

The women said she was neglecting her work, roaming the fields. But she really neglected nothing. She did her housework quickly in the morning, even with some zest, as if she were going to some delicious rendezvous. Then she hurried out talking and whispering to herself, hurried out across the road, into the fields where she could be alone, weaving in the air about her the unforgettable dream of that child, binding it forever to herself so that she could never never forget her one brief time of creation, when life was fertile and the years were making flesh and form. Carefully she wove into that pattern every known and remembered gesture, from the first movement she had felt of the unknown child within her, to its first visible sound and cry. She wove them all about her into some tangible dream that grew more real until she saw the dun world of the shack, of John, of the goats, through its mesh as through some brilliant cloth. And she walked in this bright pain weaving it about her.

John was frightened by her insistence to make the child live on. It was painful to him to think about the child so he simply did not think. When at first she had wanted to talk to him about the child she had been astonished to encounter this conspiracy of silence all about her, the closed mouth, the lowered eye. At night when she had drawn near her husband thinking now to eat with him this rich memory and he had said, "No, no, Ellen. Don't talk of it. Let's forget." she had drawn away from him as if forever. Forget. That was what she could never do. She would not alleviate her pain one whit. Lacking the child she would embrace the pain.

Her face shone with trance-like strangeness that struck fear into John, seeing her move about the stove at night after a day roving in the bright spring light of the fields. He sat at table watching her.

"Ellen, Ellen," he would call and she would be deep in her dream in which the child's bright voice pierced her and her husband's rose from afar off like the distant thunder and she paid no heed. "Ellen, Ellen!" She started and a frown came on her brow and she tried to see him.

"Ellen, you shouldn't act like you do," he said, anxiety making him harsh.

She stopped, her hands lifted.

"John," she said coming into the room and they looked at each other, "I wish . . . I know you hate to go there, but I wish you would go there. I wish you would."

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He knew where.

"John, I wish you would go there and fill in the grave a little."

"Good God," he said burying his head in his hands, "Don't talk like that."

"But it has fallen in a little and the rain will get in, and Ellen didn't like the rain. You know that." She had again that practical tone as if she must arrange things, set them in order.

He ran his hands through his hair and sat hunched over himself. She stood before him, her hands lifted in that helpless way. The room was silent and they both thought that surely the child would run in from the bedroom. He suddenly knew she was listening for the child and a shiver of black horror went up his spine and he got up and tramped heavily out of the room, past her, through the kitchen, slamming the door behind him.

She stood for a moment, her hand uplifted, listening. Then she went back to the kitchen and finished washing the dishes, and she began thinking how she could make him go and fill in the grave where it had fallen in.

The child became like some vast secret in her and she felt all the excitement women feel of sharing a secret, so sometimes she must go down the sunlit road to Mrs Pfaffer's.

The women sitting under the rose bower would look up from their sewing from under their eyes, suspicious of her ways, wary, as if she had come from another realm. She would sit down a little outside the bower, her hands folded in her lap, sitting a little on the edge of her chair as if she had important news.

"Well, how are you, Mrs Livingston?" they would ask, pursing their lips, knowing too well how she was.

But she had come for one thing. "You know this is just the kind of day little Ellen liked."

"Oh yes," The women would all look down at the ground, dropping their sewing in their laps, idly for a moment, a tribute to grief.

Ellen Livingston lifted her bright eyes upward to the bower of roses and the terror of time haunted her, the terror of the mortal place, and the terror of the immortal absence, "You remember how she used to like your rose bower. Always wanted us to make a rose bower. We never got around to it someday."

Mrs Pfaffer bit her thread off in her pursed teeth, "I don't think you ought to talk like that, Ellen Livingston. It's to the living you owe yourself, not to the dead."

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Mrs Livingston sat rebuked, looking down two spots of red coming on her cheeks. She got up.

"I must be going," she said looking around vaguely.

Mrs Pfaffer was sorry she had spoken, still, somebody had to speak. "Why, it's early, we were going to sit the afternoon."

"I must go," the bright woman said, standing before them, and they looked away from her for she seemed to have a brightness upon her of another world than theirs, as if she were partaking in some strange way of another realm, of death, and was becoming more strange and more bright than the living.

Seeing their eyes all lowered away from her she turned and without a word went off alone down the road and they laid down their sewing and watched her, peering after her around the bower, watching her go quickly on light feet down the brightened road, hurrying as if she were going on some bright journey of passion or love.

"Why she looks almost happy. I can't make it out . . ." they said, "Look at her going along. Why, she looks as bright as a dollar . . ."

The peering women looked at each other and clacked their tongues, "Tch. Tch. I'm afraid. I'm afraid . . ."

She hurried home, a thought coming into her mind . . . She went into the darkened house and she began preparing pastries for supper and she was very good at making very crisp light pastries such as are made in an English kitchen, so flaky and surprising and she knew they pleased John very much and that she had not made any for a long time. So she baked many strange little kinds of tarts and filled them with fruits she had canned when the child's prattle filled the kitchen. Now she opened them in silence, and it was only the fruit that had been preserved, not the time nor the speech, nor the loveliness.

John was pleased when he came in and felt the house warm and odorous of the baking. It was living and warm again as it had not been for a long time and his heart moved with joy but he said nothing. And she was warming to him, too, at the meal, talking to him in her quick delicate speech so he thought she had come back to him again.

After she had cleared the table and come back into the room she stood before him and he had to look up from the paper.

"John," she said, "Don't I get all the meals all right?"

"Why sure, Ellen I never said . . ."

"I know. But the neighbors say I'm neglecting you."

"Oh it ain't true, Ellen. I never said . . ."

"Don't I keep the house all right?"

"Sure. Sure."

"Well, listen John, won't you go fill in the grave a little . . ."

The cold terror came into his body again.

"—just so the rain won't get in . . ."

"Yes, I'll go," he suddenly shouted.

"Tomorrow?" she said clutching his sleeve.

"Yes, tomorrow," he said loudly.

The neighbors all said, "You better take her away. It ain't natural."

Mrs Pfaffer said, "Why land sakes, everyone loses a child. It's something we've all got to expect."

And Ellen simply looked at them with her bright exalted face, not hearing.

3.

But the next day they did not go. John looked away and said he must plow the garden. Ellen looked at him anxiously and was herself again for a respite, for she had begun to dream of the grave, of that place where death was unmitigated by memory, unresurrected, forever still and final.

Life will go on, hour after hour, day after day. Nothing can stop it, not grief, nor sorrow, nor anguish. It goes on and the living are caught in its time like flies in amber.

Despite the neighbors and her husband Ellen Livingston became enriched by her sorrow and her soul ripened in her like a rich nut encased.

Because she took all things, even death and sorrow, she was enriched more than those who rejected these things to save themselves from madness and disaster.

She lay on the black wet spring ground until it penetrated her clothing and she was shivering, and at night she saw the dipper swung far on the horizon over the night-drugged fields, saw the black unlighted shack squatting alone on the land, and she sometimes crept up and looked into the darkened window but it would be darker inside the house than outside, for where she stood a light seemed to fall from the very stars onto the plain, lighting it strangely, but inside the house it was dark and she could not make out any objects.

On such a night with the spring sprouting almost audibly around her in the ground, in the mid air where the laden boughs of the trees hung cracking open in the night air, it came to her that by miracle she might have another child, that such a thing might happen, that it was not beyond

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the realm of possibility. The year bore and brought to fruition and held death upon its breast, and then came to birth again. Why could not Ellen Livingston, learn of the earth, pattern after her? She lay a long time face down, her face in the black wet earth that brought forth from itself life and death, brought forth both as she had done.

She rose up proudly thinking herself part of the earth, valiant, bringing forth life and death equally, and then life again. She felt the beneficent cycle in herself. And the earth was old in both as she was. She put her hands on her breasts and lifted them up to the faint star fall.

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But soon Mrs Pfaffer saw John and Ellen sitting in the Ford and Ellen was dressed as if for something special and sitting bolt upright in the car, a bouquet of mustard flowers in her hand.

"I'll swear they're going to the cemetery," she said clicking her tongue.

The cemetery was a little one in the fruit hills, next to a school house. It was a very old one filled with vines and cypress trees, now taller than any trees in the valley because they had been planted by the pioneers for their dead. In the spring many old flowers came up and bloomed on their graves as if someone were still remembering them. All the fresh graves were mostly the graves of children.

A small white gate gave access to the plot. John and Ellen stepped through it. John had a spade in his hand. Ellen had the mustard flowers. They walked down a narrow path with little mounds on each side, some of them freshly made. They stopped at a fresh grave that had three fruit jars at the head. No stone had been put up yet. They both looked and saw where one corner had fallen in a little, and Ellen did not look further, fearful she would see the coffin.

A confusion came upon her seeing the grave and a kind of blackness as if she thought,—she is dead, dead. I am only pretending. This is the end. This is death. And she let herself look straight at the corner where the dirt had fallen away and she saw or thought she saw the corner of the box.

They both stood confused, looking down, John with the spade in his hand, Ellen with the mustard flowers, wondering in their flesh what death was. They were absorbed looking down, forgetting each other. Then the woman said in her sweet sweet voice so his flesh crept along the bones.

"I wonder if her body's spoiled yet."

He opened his mouth to speak and felt the wind between his lips. He thought he would fall down there and never get up. But he could not speak a word to her and he came to and found himself standing with the spade in his hand and heard water running and saw where she was leaning over the hydrant filling a fruit jar with water for her flowers. So he gripped the spade, thrust it into the earth and threw fresh dirt into the grave, packing it down closely, thrusting for more and packing it down and building it up so that at last it was firm and rounded in a good mound, then he carefully scraped some sod from the ground and packed it on the raw soil, curving it around on the mound neatly. When he had finished he was breathing hard and he took out his handkerchief to cover his face.

Ellen moved with her small delicate agility, filling the jars with her flowers, fluffing the mustard out with her hands as if she were arranging it for the living. And she had that little absorbed practicality as if death could be well ordered by her, as if she could "do" for death as she did for life.

He covered his face with his kerchief but he saw her and it gave his heart a wrench to see her so delicate, so absorbed. And he remembered her moving with this fragile consecration around the bed of the child, around the child in its high chair eating, around the living child.

When they had finished they did not know what to do. "Are you ready to go?" he said.

She looked about as if hunting for something else to do, and he was afraid she would stop again and say something frightful. "Come on," he said and he half pushed her with his body, getting between her and the grave. She went wandering, drifting away, her hands fluttering to her face and he hoped she wasn't crying.

The sun was falling in a spring shower and the trees were beginning to blossom and they drove away through the burgeoning countryside and Ellen began to talk in a low voice about the child, telling of its delicate ways, how it walked, how it looked and spoke and had its lovely being. And he drove, sending the car spurting ahead with the low stream of wounded talk striking against him until he had to strike back.

"Shut up. Shut up. Can't you? Always carping about the child."

He saw her bite her lips and look at him from afar in pain and wonder, and a chill came on them both driving through the fertile country. She put out her hands.

"But John, don't you see. . . ." She thought of the feeling she had had in the orchard of perhaps having another child.

"Always carping about the child," he said, "As if it was my fault

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something happened, my fault we didn't get the doctor in time . . . go on blame me . . ."

"But I'm not. I'm not," she cried.

And he shouted, "Go on blame me. That's it, blame me."

She cringed away as far as she could in the seat and he looked at her uneasily, she was so small.

After awhile he said. "The best thing. The best thing is not to think about it. You think about it too much, that's what it is . . ."

"No," she said.

He knew she was crying and wringing her hands together, but he couldn't look at her, couldn't turn his head. He sent the car ahead, crouching over the wheel. She clutched her hands together in her lap and she was crying.

"You make it harder, thinking and talking about it all the time. Everybody says so. I don't just say so. Everybody says that. You oughtn't to come to the cemetery at all, that's what Mrs Pfaffer says . . ."

"I want to come," she cried. "I want to," she repeated again unable to say anything else. She thought she would never be able to talk to him again. She shrank away and he was a stranger to her. She looked at him furtively, frightened to go home with him. A terrible fright came into her as if he were a stranger to her, full of an unknown menace.

They turned off the highway and she saw the shack far down the road, and despite the fact that they had built it, spun it out of their labor like a nest, it was unknown to her, and she was filled with fright, knowing that she must drive up there with this strange man as with some monster, and get out and go into that strange cold house, and cook many meals, and sleep many fitful nights; and she felt the whole dreadful routine of her coming years until death would release her also.

He was frightened too, seeing her face so pinched. She seemed diminished and the thought came to him that she would not live. His limbs turned to water. He turned into their driveway and stopped the car but neither of moved to get out. A chicken stepped across the road and looked up at them, not seeing them, and pecked in the dirt. He felt foolish sitting so still in the car and he got out slamming the door and feeling sorry that he had slammed it.

"Aren't you going to get out?" he said to her.

She didn't answer but lifted her frail body as if by a terrible effort and let herself out and walked past him, distant, into the house, and he stood weak as if he had been terribly ill and was standing upright for the first time. He went slowly towards the sheds and in a trance began

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feeding the animals, and he was not a man to find the world unreal or strange; but the sight of her distant pale face and the thought of her near death and the death of his child had plowed him up, plowed up the soil of his dumbness and impotence.

Standing by the whiskered goats who turned their round eyes to him, he was haunted by memories of their life together, things he did not often remember, how he had first seen her at a tennis match with her hair all piled above her little face and he had felt himself so dumb, so heavy beside her; how he had married her and she had cried in the night; how he had come to the farm with her; how he stood afar off and saw her delicate face, her eyes lifted, the movement of her body.

After feeding the chickens he went slowly toward the house and stood for a long time outside the door hearing her move within, laying the supper. He dreaded to go in. He wanted never to have to go through that door he had made with his own hands.

She came looking out and he stepped against the house, pressing his body against the boards and she stood not a foot away from him looking towards the sheds, wondering why he didn't come and he could hear her breathing and he held his own breath, holding it in his lungs until he thought he would die.

At last she moved into the house and he heard a chair scrape. She would not eat without him. He must go in now. He stepped forward, opened the door and stepped into the warm kitchen. He saw her through the door in the other room sitting at the table her head leaning over, resting in her cupped hands.

He stamped his feet and poured out water in the basin and splashed his face, blowing and spouting as he always did but he felt sick and weak and dreaded to have to sit down with the woman to supper. But after he had dried his face he walked boldly into the room where she sat. She let her hands fall but did not lift her face. He sat down in his chair opposite her. He saw with surprise that the child's high-chair which she had refused to put away was now gone. It surprised him. He looked at her but her face told him nothing. She looked into her empty plate.

He ate from force of habit satisfying the hunger of his body which not sorrow, nor anxiety could quench. Sometimes they looked up into each other's face and were confused. They did not try to make talk. When he had finished he wiped his mouth and got up and took the evening paper and started to read, and she got up and carried off the dishes. He thought of helping her but he hated to clump around the kitchen. He felt too awkward.

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When she had finished in the kitchen she came in and sat down, her hands folded in her lap. She started up finally and got some bit of sewing but he felt her mind wandering about the room. He wished she would read.

"Have a bit of the paper?" he said.

"No, thank you," she said going on with her sewing.

"Shall I read you a bit of the news?" he said.

"No, thank you," she said.

He thought she did not want to hear aught but her sorrow. So he turned the pages of the paper back and forth dreading to have done, to lay it aside, for then he did not know where he should look, but at the frail woman in the room that broke his heart. So he reread the funny columns carefully and read the ads and the stock reports. Then he had to lay down the paper and he got up and stretched.

"I'm mighty tired," he said, "I think I'll go to bed."

She laid down her sewing then and got up too. She stood embarrassed before him and he began to clean his finger nails with his knife.

"I wanted to thank you," she said in a small far voice, "for going with me this afternoon. I wanted to thank you."

Then for some reason he began to cry, still cleaning his nails. She saw the tears fall on his hands. And again his sorrow made him known to her. She went to him and put her arms around the powerful wedge of his waist and he put his great hand on her.

"But don't you talk about it. Don't you talk about it. It can't be borne," he said and the great drops of salt tears fell on her uplifted face and she came back to the land of the living then, swung back to the great fecund cycle of life, like the earth, like the spring. And she knew life would become not death and memory but life again, the rounding form, the mysterious passage.



SUNDAY EVENING REVERY

Edwin Rolfe

There is so little to remember
besides streets spiralling at dawn
and at dusk, when I go home;
and what remembered images I have

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I have despite myself: the salve
of one or two eternal moments
clinging to the brain.

When I
go nodding through the evening streets,
nodding to Phil, nodding to Bella,
nodding to Mr. Mendelbaum
just home from Stern's Hotel in the Catskill Mountains,
I swear I do not see
the faces that I see;
it is not I who smiles
but a disconnected muscle
no longer welded to my brain.

(and the men and the signs and the stores
gape vacantly, and everything I pass
is an always-clicking movie machine
using my eyes for a screen)

Always, I return home, white and empty.
(these things ricochét along the skin
leaving me undisturbed, unchanged within
so I may fill my empty bed
at night with equal emptiness)

Within me is the memory
of many unremembered things:
a face, a fragment of a dream,
a time-dimmed thigh that moves and clings
vaguely to my loins . . . Beyond these particles

I have no memory.



For Poly and Betty

CHRIST IN SAWYER STREET

William Chapman

I.

The sun was shining full and strong upon him when he awakened. He raised himself up on one elbow and looked around the room, his eyes blinking in the strong sunlight. He looked at all of the strange articles in the strange room and recollection sifted slowly into his brain like particles of sand falling in an hour glass.

He put his head down on the pillow again. Then he turned over on his back and clasped his hands behind his head. He opened his eyes and looked up at the white ceiling. After a while he laughed.

"This is a hell of a place for a priest," he thought.

But he wasn't a priest and was never going to be one, so he felt better.

Like little racing cars on the great wooden bowl of the race track, thoughts and faces chased one another in his mind, first one and then another ahead. Mary . . . a friendly, loving young face . . . Young Spinella, first a cruel, stupid face and then a relaxed, bleeding face . . . Aunt Margaret . . . a severe face, lined and with thin, blue lips, but kind . . . Father Sheehan. . . a strong, square face, with big, gray eyes that watched you closely . . . Paddy Holmes . . . a face like that of an intelligent, gray horse, with eyes that watched you, too . . . and then a lot of faces whose names didn't mean so much .

For quite a while he let these faces come and go and then he shut them off. He heard a clock ticking and turned over to look at it. It was ten minutes past noon so he took one last stretch and got out of the bed.

The room was not altogether strange to him because he had been in it before, but it is somehow different when you are alone in some one else's room for the first time. You go around and look at things which you had never seen before. One thing was familiar. That was a picture of himself in ring togs on the dresser. He thought he looked pretty good—the left arm extended and the right arm held close to the body and relaxed, the chin in and the head tilted as though he were looking

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through his eyebrows. It was signed: To Mary, Love from Mike.

He looked around at the pictures on the wall and snooped into a few closed drawers of the dresser but saw nothing to arouse his interest.

Deciding to take a shower he went into the bathroom and turned on the water. He didn't have to take his pajamas off because he hadn't had any on.

The shower was what he needed and at the end he turned it on cold and shadow-boxed violently until he knocked a knuckle against the regulating handle. He shut the water off and jumped out of the tub.

He had neglected to pull the shower curtain across the tub and he had splashed water all over the place. Mary's mules and pajamas were very wet. He kicked the mules aside and stood on the pajamas.

He took the big bath-towel and grabbing an end in each fist he worked the towel across his back by extending first one hand and then the other, like a boxer works the weights in the gymnasium.

Suddenly he thought to himself that it had been nice of Mary to go off and let him sleep like that.

He went back into the other room, tracking the floor with the neat, wet design of perfect feet. He saw a piece of paper dangling from the light cord over the bed so he went over and took it off. It was a note from Mary. It said: "Darling Mike I love you it was a wonderful night call me up at 5:30 there is some breakfast on the stove dearest I love you don't forget to call me up Mary."

"That's swell," he thought and went into the kitchenette. There was a pan of water standing over a small flame of gas and in it was a bowl with a cover on it. On the cover were four strips of dried-out bacon. He took the cover off and saw that the bowl was half full of scrambled eggs, soft and barely steaming. The coffee pot was only half over the other burner so that it would stay warm a long time but wouldn't boil away.

Mike took the bowl out of the water and put it down on top of the ice box. He cut three slices of bread and out of the ice box he got butter and some jam. He saw some celery so he ate that. Two of the slices of bread he buttered and on the other he put butter and jam. He got the bowl of eggs in one hand with the three slices of bread over the top of the bowl. On the top of the bread he piled the bacon. With his other hand he picked up the cup of coffee, the spoon standing up in it. He went into the other room again, put the food on the table and sat down. He was unhappy to discover that he had forgotten a fork for the

eggs, but he stirred the coffee, licked the spoon free of the sweetness and ate the eggs with it.

When he had finished eating, he sat back in the big chair and lighted a cigarette. He turned the faces on again and he sat there naked and contented, watching the faces. He dropped a spark from the cigarette on his body near his navel: the faces went out and he yelled as he jumped out of the chair.

"I guess I might as well get some clothes on," he said to himself and went into the bathroom and combed his hair. Coming out he stopped in front of the panel mirror on the bathroom door, which was swung out into the living-bedroom. He struck the fighting pose with the old left out front, waving slightly, and the right held close, but not tense to his ribs. He looked through his eyebrows at himself in the mirror and noticed that the part in the middle of his brown red hair completed a line made by the cleft in his chin, and the straight, long ridge of his nose.

Mike stood making the fighting face at himself for a few seconds and then another face came up before him. He looked it coldly in the eye and brought the left back a bit and with a contemptuous grimace half hooked and half jabbed this newcomer on the side of the jaw. This wasn't any Young Spinella. This was "Boom" O'Flaherty, the middleweight champ.

Of course, "Boom" wouldn't take anything like that. His lips curled as he fainted with that subtle left, but when he crossed the right Mike had tied him up. When they broke there was no great frenzy of wild blows. They were both too cagey for that. Mike worked around cautiously but intelligently, because he knew that his youth was a big asset. When he saw his openings he was quick to take advantage of them.

He fought "Boom" in the champion's own stand-off style and there was practically no clinching and little infighting. "Boom's" sneer wasn't quite as convincing now and Mike was glad in his heart, but he was still careful.

He saw the opening. The tiring champ led his left, which slid past Mike's right ear and he was late with his right. Mike, well inside the left, half led and half blocked with his own left hand. Then he hooked his right with everything he had to the champ's chin. He felt "Boom" go limp as a woman in his arms. He stepped back and let the champ fall on his face. He looked down at him and laughed.

When he looked up he saw his own face in the mirror again, laughing and sweating.

"What the hell," he said.

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He stood very straight and clasped his hands behind his head as he had when he had first awakened. He watched the muscles in his biceps tighten long and not knotty. His neck muscles bulged up by his ears. He had a chest like a heavyweight. His legs had the same long strong muscular arrangement as his arms except that they were finer and lighter and his feet were small and neat.

Turning, he looked at the thin waist, the great chest, the fine pattern of muscles across his back, the small buttocks and the long, straight legs.

He took his arms down and looked at the one possible weakness, his hands. They were just a bit fine. You might say they were hands too good for a prize fighter. But he wasn't worried.

Mike spread his legs apart, stretched his arms as high as he could and looked himself straight in the eye.

"Christ"! he said to himself aloud, "but you're a good man!"

He admired himself for a few seconds more and then he said: "Well, I guess I better get dressed."

II

It was three o'clock when he got to Father Sheehan's. Father Sheehan was sitting in his little library. When Mike came in he seemed glad to see him.

"Hello son," he said, "how have you been?"

"I'm O.K. Father. How are you?"

"I'm O.K., too. Sit down. Got something on your mind?"

"You said it!"

"Well, sit down and tell me about it."

"Father, I'm in a tough spot. You know you're the only person there is I can go to and really tell anything. I'm not ashamed with you and I feel as though I can cut loose when I'm with you. You know what I mean? Well, let's see, where do I begin . . . Oh, yes, I stayed with a girl last night."

"What kind of a girl?"

"A swell girl. She's got a job with the telephone company. She's got her own apartment. I like her a lot and she's crazy about me. She'd like me to marry her."

"Anything else, Mike?"

"I've only started. You know, I've decided that I can't be a priest. I mean, I've finally decided definitely that it's all off. I've been kidding myself for a long time. It's more because of Aunt Margaret than any-

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thing else that I've hung on this long. I don't want to disappoint her because, after all, she brought me up and gave me a chance in the world. But it's not going to be any good for her if I go on and turn out to be a bad priest. You'll explain it to her, won't you? You know her better than anybody."

"It wouldn't be an easy job, Mike," Father Sheehan said. "Anything else?"

"Sure. I made fifty dollars last night in a fight at the Arena. It was a cinch. I fought a guy named Young Spinella and I knocked him cold in the third. I fought under a phoney name. Paddy Holmes is trying to get me. Remember him? He's managed a lot of big shots. He says I'll be in the big dough in a year. I wish you'd been there last night. It was my fourth fight."

"I was there. You were good, Mike. You've got a swell left hand for a kid."

"You saw me? You're not sore?"

"I've seen you fight in all your fights. Gilroy, up at the Arena tipped me off. No, I'm not sore. Why should I be sore? As I say, you looked awfully good in there last night. I suppose you think you could take me by now. Well, maybe you could. I'm not boxing with you young fellows any more. It's here." He patted his mid-section with a big, strong hand. "I can't take it any more. And I don't intend to be knocked around by a lot of kids." He laughed.

"I wonder what Aunt Margaret will say when she finds out? I'm scared to death to tell her. Couldn't you tell her, Father? Couldn't you? I'd be so glad if you would!"

"It's not an easy spot you're putting me in, Mike. I've known all along what you were doing and I know pretty well what you've been thinking. I've been watching young fellows like you for years. You get on to them after a while. But I'd do anything in the world for you to help things go right. I'm a priest, Mike, and I try hard to be a good one. It's a big responsibility. Of course, I'd like to see you stay in the Church. It needs men like you. But why don't you do this? Why don't you get off on your own for a month and come back and see me then. If you decide that you want to come back to school, I'll fix it up for you. But don't come back before the month is up. Take a good swing at it and maybe you'll find out something about yourself."

"And you'll tell Aunt Margaret?"

"I'll do the best I can, Mike."

"Thanks, Father. I can't thank you enough."

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"That's all right, Mike. I'm fond of you. I was fond of your father, too. And you are a crazy sort of an Irishman, just like he was."

"What was the old man like, Father?"

"Well, let's see . . . He was one of the worst newspapermen I ever met in my life and he had one of the best tenor voices I have ever heard. He could sing way up high, sort of like McCormack. Three drinks and he'd sing all night and we'd all sit around and listen. It was great. He wouldn't sing for money. Said it was degrading. He was a bad drunk sometimes. Broody. And sometimes he broke things—bottles, pianos, anything. But we always got along fine. I think if your mother had lived that he probably wouldn't have drunk himself to death. Not so quickly, anyway. He didn't know how to take care of money. I remember one night he tried to make a horse eat a five dollar bill. And went home in a huff because the horse refused. He had great stuff in him but he never knew what to make of it. He was an unhappy man and an unfortunate one."

"He must have been a pretty good guy."

"He was. Are you drinking much?" the priest asked.

"Some," Mike said, "but not very much. It makes you feel better sometimes when you get worried about things."

"What kind of things?"

"Oh, you know, about me not wanting to be a priest, and Mary, and Aunt Margaret wanting me to be a priest. You know how she is. She'd die if she knew I were fighting. But it's where I belong. And there's no way I can tell her about it. How could you ever explain to her the thrill of having a guy throw a left at you and then you beat him to it and conk him with your own left and the good feeling against your hand when you catch him right. And you watch the guy close because you know he's going to get you if you don't get him and when he begins to sag the way you feel glad inside and have sort of a tight feeling around your heart when things begin to go your way for the first time in the fight. Gee, I can get all hopped up just thinking about it!"

"I know what you mean," Father Sheehan said, quietly. "And I think you're good. That's some left you've got. But do something for me, will you, Mike? Take care of yourself. You'll go far if you do. But remember, all these birds you're going to meet aren't Young Spinellas, and you're going to need all you've got. Take care of yourself. And go to Church, son."

"I get it," Mike said, "and I'll do it. Thanks for everything you've done. I feel better having someone on my side. I'm going looking for

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Paddy up at the Arena. Can you go see Aunt Margaret this afternoon? Thanks, Father. It means a lot to me."

He went off looking for Paddy. He forgot to call up Mary.

III

Everything went swell until the fourth round. Gunboat Gray had seen better days. His legs were slow. His fastest move was now a slow shuffle. He was game, smart, and still could swing a mean right hook to the body. His left hand wasn't so good because he had broken it too many times.

Mike was doing his best to keep cool. Gray was his first really experienced opponent. And Paddy had said: "Now, Mike, for Christ's sake, don't go out and try to kill this mugg. He's no push-over. You can take a lot, but if he ever nails you with that right in the gut you're going to know it. Keep that straight left out there. He'll never lay that right on you if you keep that left out. And you don't have to worry too much about his left. He couldn't dent a paper rose with that. If you see an opening let him have it, but no wild chances, remember."

"O.K.," Mike had said. And in a minute he had shaken hands with the Gunboat, got the instructions from Tim Bryan, the referee, rubbed his feet in the resin, and turned around fast when the gong rang to start the fight, rushing halfway across the ring to face the veteran.

The first round was even and Mike had a slight edge in the second. The straight left worked like a charm. The Gunboat was aggressive enough in his plodding way. But he kept running on that straight left and once in a while Mike crossed his right to Gray's jaw, shaking the old timer but not checking his bobbing attack. The third round was fairly even, too, with Mike having a small advantage.

"You look like a million, kid," Paddy said between rounds. "Keep the left out there and this round you might go a little faster. We might finish him this round. He's getting pretty tired. He's a damn good actor, though. Go to it, Kid." The gong rang for the fourth.

For a minute the two boxers sparred around, Mike keeping Gray off with the jabbing left. Once Mike saw an opening and hooked his left hard to Gray's head. But it slid off the graying head and in a flash Gray was in close, had stepped to one side, blocking Mike's right with his own left hand, and crashed the right into Mike's stomach. Mike felt himself go faint and nauseated. He grabbed Gray with both hands and held on until Bryan broke them loose.

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He looked over Gray's shoulder at Paddy. Paddy was gesticulating with his left hand stuck out straight. Mike knew what he meant. So he waited for Gunboat to rush him and stuck the left in his face. The Gunner thought he had a chance so he kept rushing at Mike, trying to get inside that left again. He swung one hard at Mike's head that landed on the left temple. Mike clinched again feeling not too strong and feeling silly because he had let Gray get to him. Over in the corner Paddy was still waving the left hand out in front of him.

The bell rang for the end of the round and Mike was glad to rest. Paddy started to work over him, rubbing his chest and stomach and giving him the water.

"He had you going then," Paddy said.

"The Hell you say," Mike gasped.

"All right, wise guy, you know everything. I tell you he had you going and only because you took that pot shot of a left hook at him and let him get inside there. Now, go out and keep that left out there. And slide in a little before you throw the right. You haven't hit the guy flush with that right cross yet. Hell, I don't know what's the matter with you. I guess you're just a mugg, too."

"That's right," Mike said, "maybe I am."

"No, just a wise guy." The bell rang, "Keep the left out."

At the end of the six rounds the judges called it a draw. Mike was pretty mad. He was madder when he went over to shake hands with Gunboat Gray because Gray said: "You'll be pretty good someday, kid, if you ever learn anything."

That was a laugh! This tin-eared, broken down pug lands a lucky one and then starts giving advice. He was lucky to get a draw, Mike thought.

"After all, I really only lost one round," he said to Paddy.

"As far as I'm concerned you lost the fight. And I don't want you to start alibi-ing yourself at this stage of the game. You may have need for it sometime. But there was no excuse for tonight. I don't want to be tough on you. And no matter what the fight racket is like, you've got to be wise to yourself. You can't kid yourself, not for very long anyway. Let's forget about this one tonight. Go home and get some sleep. We'll start in early tomorrow. We're fighting Eddie Binns next week. I've got to scram. Good night, kid. And don't let it burn you up too much. So long."

"So long, Paddy. I'm sorry I was so punk."

He finished dressing and walked up to the drug store on the corner

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and was about to call up Mary but changed his mind. She would be sweet and sympathize and kiss the little cut beside his eye many times. That would be nice but he decided that he would rather be alone.

He walked slowly down Thomas Street trying to figure the thing out. Gray wasn't so good as Young Spinella and he wasn't so good as the Brady Kid and he had knocked them both sprawling. He walked about fifteen blocks before he would make the admission to himself.

"I guess he knew too much for me. Well, I can learn. I'm no Einstein, but I guess I can learn as much as that punk Gray."

He saw a speakeasy on the other side of the street. He walked diagonally across and went in. He had never been in the joint before. It was half full and he walked to the far end of the bar.

There was not any one in the place he knew. The bartender came up and said: "What d'ya say?"

"Rye and ginger on the side," Mike said.

IV.

When Mike came out there was a promise of dawn over the place. A heavy fog had crept out of the river and settled back to rest on the city. The arc lights looked like a fake, Mike thought.

"Well, I certainly had my drinking pants on tonight," he said to himself.

When he had started he had planned to keep count and stop at four drinks, but the bartender bought the fourth and Mike owed a round for three fellows he had been talking with, so that made five and he was just beginning to relax. They talked about fights and fighters and Mike wanted to tell them who he was, even though he didn't amount to much yet. But he thought he had better not because some fellows don't like to see fighters out drinking all night.

At the eighth drink he told them that Mike Shaw, a young middle-weight was his best friend and then he told them about himself. They said that Shaw sounded pretty good and they'd go down and see him at the Arena and maybe get a bet down on him when he fought Binns. After about four more drinks they went and after Mike had two more the place was empty except for the bartender and a drunk who was sleeping it off on a table. The bartender bought one more and then Mike helped him get the drunk out and close the place.

"Well, here I am," he said.

He could hear the boats in the river hooting at each other. He stood

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for a while and looked around in the dim light, down the empty street at the line of streetlights and he liked the looks of the ghostly halos, made by the fog, around each light. Then he turned and started back toward the Arena which was also the way home.

He did not stagger but he walked cautiously like a person not quite sure of his footing. He could feel the muscles in the corner of his mouth sagging and numb. His eyes were heavy for sleep and burning from the smoke in the speakeasy. He thought it remarkable that his brain could be so clear and as he walked along he saw those many faces in his mind which meant so much to him. First he tried to arrange them in the order of their importance, but he could not make up his mind about some of them. For example, he could not quite decide what the respective positions of Mary, Aunt Margaret and Father Sheehan should be. They were each so important in their way. So he finally started dividing things up into departments and put each of them at the head of one.

The former stables, now the Arena, stood out black through the midst and Mike had a friendly feeling for them. Here in the Arena, amidst the smoke, the blood, the clamor of gongs and voices, and before that mass of motion behind the ring lights which was the crowd, an important act in his life was being played. He thought of his coming fight with Binns and the memory of Paddy and Gray surged back into his mind.

He wondered if he would ever get straightened out so that he really knew what he was doing, instead of fumbling around from day to day.

"I'll be twenty-one pretty soon . . . gee, it doesn't seem possible . . . I'm not a kid any more . . . I ought to be getting wise to myself pretty soon . . . I'd like to meet that mugg Gray now . . ." and he swung a half dozen punches as he went along.

It was getting lighter when he turned into Sawyer Street and he was still a half mile from home. It would be nice to live on Sawyer Street sometime, Mike thought. Well, he could do it. Look at Dempsey and Tunney and Sharkey. The street lights went out and left the world colder and grayer.

He walked along peering through the fog at the grand houses. He couldn't keep Paddy out of his mind and he felt mean and disloyal for having stayed out all night.

He had walked a half block up Sawyer Street when suddenly, an awful thing happened to him. He could not believe it and he stopped, stiff with fear and blinked his eyes hard, but when he looked the man was still there and the dreadful thing about it was that the man was Christ.

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He stood there, a vague figure with arms raised as in a benediction. His long white robe looked very clean. His brown hair hung over his shoulders and his beard was long and not very well trimmed. But he looked straight at Mike with the kindest and clearest pair of eyes he had ever seen.

It must have been funny: the two of them, alone, standing there facing each other through that strange, early light. If it had been anyone but Christ Mike would not have been afraid because he had such a friendly, gentle look.

But after all it was Christ, and he heard himself mumbling things he had learned in church and he hoped that they were the right ones. He felt himself grow weak and trembling. Finally, his legs would not hold him any longer and he went down on his knees with his head buried in his arms. He knelt there on the wet sidewalk and prayed as hard as he knew how and tears came to his eyes.

He never knew how long he stayed in that position but the sound of a milk wagon rattling down the street gave him the courage to look up and when he did there was no one there. He looked all around and seeing no one in sight, except the milkman way down the street, he got to his feet and started to run. And as he ran he prayed and sobbed, keeping time with the rhythm of his running feet.

He got to Mary's and let himself into her apartment. He threw his clothes off as quickly as possible and got into the bed, his body shaking, his teeth chattering, his breath still coming in sobs and the tears still coming from his eyes. Mary awakened.

"Oh Mike darling, where have you been? I've been so worried. Oh, dearest, what's the matter? Are you hurt?"

"No," he sobbed, "I'm drunk and tired and I've had a terrible time."

Mary took his head in the crook of one arm and held his shaking body close to her.

"What is it, darling?" she asked.

"I can't! Really, I can't!"

"Why not, darling? Tell Mary. Mary loves you. Is it something terrible? But that's all right, you know I love you, don't you?"

"Mary!"

"Yes, Mike."

"Mary, I saw Christ!"

"Oh, dearest, don't talk like that . . ."

"But I did! Really I did!"

"Mike dear, you're so tired. Go to sleep. You're all upset."

"But I did! I tell you, I did!"

"Don't Mike. You're frightening me."

"But I did!"

"Please, darling, for me, don't say that any more."

Mary caressed him with her nice, gentle hands and after a while he fell asleep. In a little while Mary had to leave him because it was time for her to go to work.

V

"Hello, Mike," said Father Sheehan, "you didn't go so well last night. But don't let it worry you. It probably did you a lot of good. What's the matter, son, you don't look very well? Sit down."

"I don't feel very well," Mike said. He sat down and fiddled with his hat.

"Let's see . . . It's almost a month since we had our last big talk. How have things been going?"

"Things haven't been going so well, Father."

"What's wrong, Mike?"

"Well, last night I had something funny happen to me. I met Christ on Sawyer Street."

"What's that?"

"I said I met Christ on Sawyer Street."

"Were you sober?"

"Not exactly. - But that isn't it. I saw Christ all right."

"Maybe you had better tell me about it. Start from the beginning."

So Mike told him the whole story. He told how he had been living with Mary and how so far as that went he had been very happy.

"It's wrong, Father, I know. But she is very good to me and I love her. I want you to know her some time."

"I'd like to, Mike. But why don't you get married? You can't go on like this."

"Let me tell you the rest of the story."

He told about the fight last night and how Paddy had been angry. Then he told of drinking most of the night and finally of how, coming through the vague, gray veil of the morning fog, he had met Christ.

"And it's that I don't understand," he said. "What does it mean? What am I to do about it? It must mean something. And it is not because I was drunk. I tell you, Father, I was not that drunk. I saw Christ. I could have touched him!"

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Father Sheehan sat behind his desk, leaning on his elbows and supporting his chin deep in the palms of his hands. Neither spoke for a moment and then Father Sheehan looked up at Mike, who had been watching the priest closely.

"I know what you think, Mike. It looks like a sign, doesn't it? Something that is pointing out the way. A sign that indicates that you should go back into the Church. In the history of the Church there have been many instances of Divine manifestation, but most of them were a long time ago. It seems to be going out lately. And I suppose I should say to you that your way is clear, that there is no alternative but that you should come back and continue your study for the priesthood. And at this time I suppose that I could convince you quite easily that the arms of the Church are more than open to you. You are probably ready now to come back.

"It is not that I am altogether opposed to it. My feeling is that you will get more from the Church by being on the outside as communicant than you would by being on the inside as a priest. I feel that the Church can do much more for you than you can do for the Church.

"I look back over my shoulder, Mike, down through the corridor of my years in the Church. The path is straight and there are many, many doors which I may not open. There are more doors when you are young and the agony of passing them by, without so much as putting a hand on the door knob, is an awful thing sometimes. As one gets older it is better. But I think of you as coming down that corridor breaking down doors indiscriminately, running in and out of rooms where you had no right, and all the time the sharp sword of conscience sticking in your heart. I don't think you could stand it.

"And another thing I must tell you. You didn't see Christ. No, you didn't. You saw a man named Paul Schoenfeld. Schoenfeld is a man of an excellent Jewish family.

"They are wealthy and respected. They are leaders in a fine Jewish society here, which lives within its own circle, and the philanthropies and good works of these people are excelled by no others in this city.

"Paul Schoenfeld is about forty years of age. He was sent to the best schools here and abroad. But early in his life he developed an unfortunate persecution complex. He suffered considerably at the hands of less well bred students than himself because he was a Jew. And as a result his mind was twisted first in one direction and then another.

"He first repudiated his family and their faith. He joined a Christian church and was baptised. But he never felt that he was accepted. He

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travelled, he married and did all of the things possible to keep his mental balance, but it was no use. He had a complete mental and physical breakdown a few years ago and although he has recovered physically his mind is gone. He imagines that his body contains the spirit of Christ, and that he, too, will someday be hanged upon a cross.

"He lives with his family on Sawyer Street and he is not supposed to go out of the house alone. The police know about him. I went to see him once last year at the request of his father. We had a delightful conversation and when I was through I thought it strange that he should be considered insane. Because, Mike, he was teaching me."

Father Sheehan looked at Mike.

"Well, Mike, what do you think of it?"

The color was back in his face and the lines gone from his forehead.

"I feel better," he said. "And I think I get what you mean about the corridor business, too."

"There is only one thing I want to ask of you and that is: Will you go to Church regularly. And try to be a good Catholic. You really need to be, Mike."

"I'll try, Father," he said.

He went out and walked down the street.

"They ought not let crazy guys like that go running around the street in the middle of the night scaring people to death," he said to himself.

He went into the drug store to call up Paddy and Mary. He had a lot of explaining to do. He called up Mary first.

"Sure, darling," he said, "sure, I'm all right. We'll have dinner together and go to a show. Yes . . . everything's all right about last night. Yeah, it's all right. It was a nut. Sure, a crazy guy. I'll tell you about it later."



ONE OF THE OTHER

Kenneth White

Let my body come to yours forever
Through the door repeating through the door
Its steps revolving in cartwheels of light.
Let my body down beside yours lie,

The fearful valediction, into sleep
And rest, the each of us, upon the spring
Crushed down in us with noon through panes
And heavy evening. Let our bodies

Rise on the straightening coils, mine rise
With yours in the heat sprung touching
Between stars falling opposite to earth
Rising between cool passages of light.



THE SUMMER WITCHES

Benjamin Appel

One afternoon, she said: "Fetch the laundry." Her precise lips were thin with directions. One mile down the road. Then turn off. Even a fool could remember that. Even he wasn't such a fool, was he? She thought of the washerwomen who lived without a man and naturally had a bad reputation. Little drops of sweat glistened in the corners of his stubborn eyes. The fool wasn't crying, was he? She had to affirm her authority.

He set off. As he walked his flannels threw moving columns of glaring progress into his gaze. The white dust stirred in sultry clouds, browning the cuffs. He wiped his face—already burned the mongrel red tan of a man in his first week of vacation and determined to get all the sun he could. Gleam and faded glitter sustained an intense sweat-pouring heat. A field of corn shone like a garishly painted picture. A pasture sweltered in the identical slack resignation that enervated a few cows, whose tails hung limp like wet ropes. Every time he pulled out his handkerchief the sun made a sickening glare of it. How long was a mile, anyway?

Thick bunches of green saplings lined the side road. Perpetually sighing among the leaves of young trees, the docile breeze spilled into his ears like cooling drops. Shadows leaf-parasoled his head. He thrilled with the moss-dripping shivers that grip men who escape the hottest core of heat. What of the washerwomen? His mind was an ocean and they

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floated in the languid liquidity of his thoughts, prosaic mermaids. He saw their arms digging into solid soapy waters. He heard the flaky splashes they were always hearing. What a nice hot day.

A small frame house tattooed with nails, a young pine bending in the adoration of young trees, a big kettle on the porch, hens and a rooster clattering about as if humans never fried eggs, and Silence. The door was half open, presenting that darkling gape of mysterious space, doors that are neither shut or open convey to strangers. He knocked. A voice slipped out.

He first saw a table laden with dirty dishes piled in an incoherent architecture of teetering circles. Three women, in a blend of eyes and skirts, warmed their femininity at this stranger male. Two brown hands plunged and plunged into foaming white suds. Someone was washing clothes. She stood strongly on her bare feet, buxom with forty years. Her blouse was open at the throat, her skirt flared out into a bell of light tan cloth. "Hello," she said.

He liked her unlined neck, soft as her bosom; the coils of her black hair, the sudsy gleam of her teeth. "I've come for Mrs. Gifford's washing."

"Well, it won't take me long to iron it. I've been so rushed." She dumped the contents of a basket on a table. The iron began to slide up and down Mrs. Gifford's things like some sort of locomotive.

The road back was an intense miniature in his brain, a concentrated essence like the burning ray of a sun glass. He heard the harsh voices of the sparrows. His bones melted. Time enough to arrive at the cottage of bawdy green, with curtains the color of crabapples. Time enough to enter the "abode" Mrs. Gifford described as "summery" and "so like the leaves and flowers." In this interior time wasn't so brassy and ruthless. "Do you mind if I wait?"

"No, no. Sit down. You must be warm."

Now, that he had her portrait in the gallery of this remembering afternoon, he turned towards the other women. They were young. They sprawled on a deep bed. The blue curtained sunlight painted gold specks on them. He was impressed by their lolling ease. One of the girls was sitting, her feet wide apart, her dress hollowing between her legs. She was precisely curved in slimness, one of those women who appear to be carved out of steel blades.

"I'm Mr. Gifford," he declared, as if his name might serve as a handle to his newness, a something to grasp.

"I'm Carmel."

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They all laughed with the tender caution of strangers who are inclined to like one another.

Behind Carmel, the other girl rolled on her side, a plump olive of a woman, glossy with neat fat. The immense seductive contour of her hip drowsed up like a high hill. She was younger than Carmel, her charms were ampler. He found himself tracing outlines beneath her dress with the pleased abstract seduction of a man lured by one of those gaudy voluptuous girls who only live on calendars. Brown eyes, brown arms. She looked naked and brown and soft all over.

"And what's your name?" He wondered if he had a contented headache? Certainly, his head was tight, a pleasant numbness. When she said, Mary, he led the laughter. He heard his voice blurting hysterical chuckles. I really am cracked but it's nice.

Carmel had lazily taken up the washing. Suds foamed and foamed and the clean smell of soap coolly mating with water bubbled in his nostrils. She seemed to be idling. Her splashing hands threw up incessant gurgling fountains in the big basin. He listened to the fountains and then turned his eyes—he thought they were goggling like a frog's—to the woman pressing Mrs. Gifford's things.

"What's your name?"

"Marguerite."

"I'm Tom Gifford. I don't mind if you call me Tom." How pleasant it would be to doze, listening to the lullabies the dirty linen sang with the purifying waters.

"Tom," Marguerite exclaimed in an odd shrill voice, winking. The lid, a swarthy petal, closed over the gleam of her eye like a descending curtain.

I'll bet they like me. His pleasant headache was tighter about his temples. He sat down and let their names brighten his dull thoughts like insects glow—pointing against a black night. Glow names. Mary, Carmel, Marguerite. If he had married brook silver Carmel or Mary, the ripe pear, or good staunch Marguerite instead of Mrs. Gifford, lady of caloric carrots. Why did the woman tyrannize it over cauliflowers?

He imagined the vindictive pleasures that were now tormenting the cottagers. Men playing cards or holding fishing poles over the dead blueness of the lake. Women clacking their mean sexual spites. Children playing with the sticky stubbornness of kids on a vacation. The night would be even worse. Dancing; the silhouettes would engage in the charming fantasies of shadows; some of the men would daub their faces with passion and try to get up affairs. Too bad the swollen summer moon

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hung like a lamp, the night a cool great room of romance. The children would squawk, still hopelessly sticky. Wasn't summer an intense heedless maid not to be won by strenuous wooing? Come to me if you care to, dear summer. The slop slop of mauled water tinkled. Did the bare feet of the women prove anything?

Marguerite's half naked shoulders were made of robust middle-aged flesh. How delicious to girdle her waist with his stealing arm, to feel the contours of her back merge with the softening stone of his chest, to press his firm lips on the nape of her neck. What would the reaction be? A why-did-you-do-that, a lowering face, scowls and a lined forehead as if kisses were anti-feminine? No, not that. Would the earth be angry if he kissed its perfumed expanse, or a tree invoke the feeble word walls of honor and chivalry if he kissed its scaly skin?

"Mrs. Gifford has quite a few things," she said.

He felt so cool because he knew the sun was baking outside. His body seemed to put on layer after layer of coolness as if he were an apple on a bough, and was fresh in the delectable manner of ripening fruit. When he rolled tongue in mouth, he could almost taste the vagrant flavor of the luncheon lemonade. The tinklets of water were silent and Carmel was gone from the tub.

"It would be better," he answered, "if Mrs. Gifford wore less. When she goes swimming she wears sneakers." He walked over to the bed and sat down by the side of Carmel. Her smooth firm thigh bit into his with the ardor of an embrace. I wonder if she minds? It was as harmless as swimming in a lovely pool. Mary was lying face downwards, her calves faintly flirted with his back. He considered turning around and kissing the top of each calf. He had noted the worn areas, the hollow hinges where the lower legs are fleshed to the upper ones. She's firm all over. Such nice calves but it wouldn't do to kiss them.

Carmel's face flashed at him like a mirage. He was adorned by the brilliant gemmed expression of her eyes—shining like bright waters—and surrounded by the pleasantest brown flesh hands he had ever seen.

"Would you mind," he asked, "if I take off my shoes?" and he did, crumpling each sock into their warm leather caverns. His naked feet looked as if they were ashamed of him. "Ladies, I'm intoxicated. I'm cracked. I've never known what summer was until to-day."

"Once a year comes the summer." Marguerite ironed one of his shirts. He stared at its stiff eccentricity as if it were an old friend strangely mutilated.

"Good old summer time." Carmel winked at Mary.

"Most people don't know that." And all the while her hard thigh was kissing his own. The two of them were carrying on a secretive love affair unsuspected by the others.

"They must be fools." Her face was as calm as if no man's thigh was pressed against her own. Her attitude depressed him but when he glanced at his bare feet his pleasure was renewed.

Twisting his head, he saw Mary lounging on her face. The panorama of her body, curving from shoulder to hip and sweeping down to her calves, struck his eye with the fatality of a range of hills. Her face strained to look at him, she smiled, seeing upside down like a reflected image in water. How hollow was the hollow of her back, how round the haunched hillocks.

"I'll have your laundry, soon." Marguerite was ironing one of Mrs. Gifford's elaborate underclothes. It resembled a dried-up sea jelly, a pink one.

What a pity these three fine women and himself should gather for the one purpose of ironing Mrs. Gifford's things. Who was Mrs. Gifford anyway? If he beckoned to them would they come to him? their bodies nesting into his own. He would pluck their eyes of all their warmths, ruthlessly, as if he were picking rarer daisies. Hand in hand they would leave the house. He would kiss their round cheeks as their faces flailed warm against his own. And they would all laugh.

"Summer's a funny season," he said wistfully.

Mary was so full and plump she appeared to be asleep. Her curves fascinated him with the vanishing roundness of the unstraight. Carmel got up, stretched lazily. She leaned against the table and her hands and limp fingers dangled from her loose arms. She was negligent as a light summer rain. She partially sat on the table, the sharp edge made hardly any indentation in her strong haunches.

"I'll bet you're a grand dancer," he said. "Your heels are small and firm. Your legs are beautiful. You're lithe. You're a wind."

When he left that afternoon, the laundry under his arm, he was tired and happy. Thinking of the three women, the fragrant, short-lived afternoon, he felt as if he had lived months, known July and August and June.

It's been a grand summer, he thought as if it were all over and he were looking past the frontier of Labor Day. The dusty road stretched back to Mrs. Gifford and the green cottage "so summery, so like the leaves and grass." But the summer was really over.



"DIS, CONNAIS-TU L'IRREMESSIBLE?"

Jay du Von

Ahead the highway lies smooth and fast under
the light of the headlamps.

There are few farms
and fewer villages and for ten miles
the road holds to the shadow of low hills
before it wheels to the right
and leads straight and level across the prairies.
Running east the hills are behind.
and the horizon rolls low before us.

There has been no snow within the month
and the night is cold
with a firm clear wind from the north.

We come a long way in the wind of the evening,
talking, but oftener still, and then a long time
and the curves begin and at slackened speed
we sweep into the valley, and we are here.

(And all so much has gone before, simple things
and youth and fine keen hopes, and all has passed
and now she calls, and here I am with her.)

*So glad, she whispers, so glad you came.
I really didn't know, she says, if you were home.
You are away so much, she smiles, Paris, London
And, of course, New York. You are away so much.
Mexico? You just returned, you say, she says.*

(And I remember her full young smile
and the swift grace of her step, and the sweet
smell of her hair, and the skies and the rains
and the winds in all the days and nights
of my fourteenth year.)

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*And this is Grace. Meet Grace. May I present?
In an aside. This Grace is hot. She is—and on and on.*

*Another beer? There's still lots more. Or Bourbon?
Drink up. Let's all get tight, she says, and tighter.
Peter, you know, Peter my husband. You met him at the wedding.
Peter is out of town.*

(And cool fresh nights and stars and the whir
of the motor and her hand in mine; and flower shows
in the park; and swimming near the dam, and tennis even.
Skating at the old canal; a crisp wind sweeps strong
along the towpaths and with open coats we fly
like ice-boats; often we stop to warm our hands
in each others.)

*Things are so dull, she sighs, and always so.
Peter works and drinks so hard; we talk and drink and dance.
Things are so dull, and always so.*

(And the summer and the fear in our embrace
on blankets by the river near the hill—
and many more and many many more.)

*My children, she insists,
will have splayed thumbs
from standing here
with spiked and uptilt beer.*

They shall inherit the earth
with splayed thumbs
and other
acquired characteristics.

*Here are the books you gave me. Look.
Do you remember? I have so little time to read
these days.*

Above our eyes and the strata of smoke
and the heads and our talk

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the pictures from her father's house
are cool and dark and someway secret
long remembering.

*Life's funny, isn't it? She says. It's been so long
And now, it can't be stopped, it can't.*

And then that quick firm clench of flesh
and easy urban and accomplished conquest.
These are the warm, sweet open lips,
the rich smooth curving thighs,
and these the high round breasts.

And this:
The depth and breadth of practice and experience.

(Bluewhite mist belabors a bluegrey night,
remembering the smiles, the sharp young hopes
and the dark river always below the hill.)



EAST OF THE MOUNTAINS

Robert Cantwell

They had started down a secret path to the river, for they intended to cross the river and go into the logged-off hills beyond it, where they had a blackberry patch no one else knew about. The secret path led through a swampy cluster of devil's club below the mill-pond, and then up, through a dryer section of forest, to an orchard that was dying, through a barn that had fallen down, and past a farmhouse that had burned.

There were two of them; they were neighbor boys who lived in nearby adjoining houses at the edge of a small mill town on the west slope of the Cascades. The path they took was almost the longest possible way to the river, but they followed it because they were afraid that if they didn't someone would see the buckets they carried, would follow them, and discover their patch. As far as the older of the two boys was concerned he would have preferred to run this risk rather than go through

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the dead farm, even in the bright morning sunlight, but his companion had no sense of fear over things he could not see, and Dana would not admit his own. He thought, more because of this than anything else, that Johnny was not even afraid of the things he could see, and this was in spite of his being able to see much more than himself, for he knew his own eyes to be pale and enlarged behind his thick glasses. Perhaps it was because he could see so clearly he was not afraid.

Nothing was left of the farmhouse but the fireplace and a broad spire of chimney that lifted up, at the head of a mound of grass growing sparsely over the ashes, like a tombstone over a grave. The trees had burned with it, and the milkhouse, and all the scratched, shaded earth that should have surrounded it was grown over. The ashes and the twisted nails formed a black crust between the blades of grass, over the true ground, and the powdered cement had spilled from between the bricks to settle at the base of the fireplace. The spire seemed to lean, to move, over the waves of heat that held suspended a few feet above the motionless grass. The place was all ferns and thistles; it was dead, with a silence that made the faint sounds of summer noticeable and loud—the grasshoppers and the birds, the low cracking that came from the fields, like the sounds of stalks breaking, or of shells and pods bursting in the heat. The woods were green walls on four sides; the fields sloped under the brown grass, and at the highest point the fireplace stood like a monument on a forgotten battlefield.

They had filled their pockets, at the orchard, with the tough, wrinkled early apples that were as hard as rocks, and they threw these, as they walked on, into the clumps of brush in which the people who might be spying on them might be hiding. Even if the farm was haunted it could not be haunted on the hot, July morning, but as Dana stared at the spot where the farmhouse had been, wondering how it had looked before it had burned, and if anyone had died in the fire, he saw, or thought he saw, a dark, ghostly shape rise from the mound, hover an instant on the rising waves of heat, and disappear.

He looked away, and his eyes held the strain in blinding splinters of light. After a moment everything was clear again; he saw the still grass, the still trees, his stubby shadow beneath him. Johnny was running on toward the house, holding his bucket over his mouth and nose, and shouting into it, to listen to the reverberations that came out with a hollow, droning roar. Dana raced after him, and when he caught him said breathlessly, "Something's up there!" Johnny stopped, squinting his eyes and thrusting his head forward. A ghost? What was it like? He could see nothing,

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at first, but after a moment he thought he saw something, something, all arms and legs, moving by the fireplace—it looked as though it might be digging. Dana's eyes still hurt him, and he listened as he might have listened if he had been truly blind. It was digging, Johnny whispered, whatever it was, it was digging! They sank down to hide themselves in the tall grass. They went forward, slowly, lying flat and trying not to stir the grass—they went forward because they could not go back, and they wanted to reach the wood beyond. They crawled forward slowly, when a ghostly voice stopped them, and stretched them out motionless on the ground.

"Well," it said, "what have you got in those buckets?"

They tried to make themselves invisible by lying as flat as they could. "*Don't breathe!*" Johnny whispered. "*Don't breathe!*" Dana held himself down. He wanted to run; it was hard to lie still in the hot grass, the dry, broken blades jabbed his cheeks and the grains got in his mouth and eyes, and stuck to the sweat on his face. Johnny lifted himself up slowly until the top of his head was above the grass. He let himself down again, at the end of a long moment, and reached over to grip Dana by the shoulder.

"It's Mr. Murdock," he whispered. "Run for your life."

They went out, running hard, while the grass pulled at their feet like water. They did not run very far, however, for Mr. Murdock called to them, in a friendly voice, "Oh, wait, wait a minute!" They stopped, looking at each other and then at Mr. Murdock, and Johnny threw the last of his apples at a chipmunk that bounced along over the broken fence. Dana stood still and stared at Mr. Murdock as he lifted himself up beside the fireplace. He was very tall; when he stood up he was nearly as tall as the chimney. He had been whittling. His suit was speckled with the shavings, and the white flakes of wood dropped as he stood up. When he came nearer Johnny stopped throwing. His feet moved nervously; he was ready to run again.

"Well, boys," Mr. Murdock said. "What are you carrying away?"

They were silent; they glanced at each other, and after a moment Johnny shouted, "*Nothing!*"

"Oh, nothing," he repeated, smiling, "how can you have a bucket full of nothing?"

They laughed loudly, and Johnny ran down the path, scooping up some rocks as he ran, and throwing them into the brush. Mr. Murdock stared after him as he ran, still smiling to himself, while Dana stood by self-consciously, glancing up at the man's large, heavy face that was

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darkened with a growth of beard over his cheeks and chin. He looked hot and tired as he turned back to look down at Dana, and to ask, with a mild wonder, "Why is he running?"

Dana hesitated. "Oh," he explained at last, "he's just embarrassed," and Mr. Murdock laughed again.

He closed his pocket knife, and brushed the flakes of wood from his clothes. "Aren't you the little neighbor boy?" he asked. "What's your name?" But he seemed to pay no attention when Dana replied; he looked down at Johnny again, who was circling slowly back, looking every way but toward them. "And what's his?"

"Well," he said, after Dana told him. "That's a nice name."

The morning was more than ever hot and windless, and in the distance, down the slight slope of the field, Johnny seemed to float along over the grass on the shiny waves of heat. They lifted, with their bright, glassy texture, a few feet over the ground, and everything beneath them seemed to be melting and running together. Dana was no longer afraid, but he was still uneasy; he felt some sense of danger in the man's large hands, in his age and height and weight, in the short black spines of his beard. He wondered why he could not work, and why he wandered around in the woods—they often saw him sitting motionless on a log, or on a soft growth of moss, staring vacantly at green vines and trees as though he looked at them and did not see them, or as though he saw them dully as all the same. They often saw him, and when they did they went around him, or behind him, and if they saw him coming up the road toward them they crossed the road, or turned around, and went the other way. They were afraid of him because no one knew what he did, or what he was going to do; no one knew anything about him except that he had moved, with his wife and baby, a few weeks before, into the house next to those Dana and Johnny lived in—a small wooden house that had been vacant for so long they still called it the vacant house.

Then they had watched him, several weeks before, when the truck backed up to the sidewalk, help the driver unload; they had seen how he did not do very much work, and how he pretended to be working hard; they saw how he always lifted the light end of whatever was carried in, and how he always dropped his end first. He was a poor worker, they learned, for the next day the company truck unloaded a pile of two-by-fours and one-by-twelves beside the house, and he began building a high, closed fence around his back yard. It took him a long time to build it, for he sawed each piece separately, and carried it to its place to nail it before

he went back to saw another. When the fence was finished his wife and baby moved into the house.

His wife was a small, straight woman with black hair that always fell in two braids down her back, and with a dull brown complexion that made her look, as Dana's mother said, as though she had Indian blood in her. The house was usually dark, and the windows were usually shaded. The women called on her, but she did not invite them in, and after that they watched her through their windows, and told each other what they saw. They did not see very much; the fence was tight and blind and solid, and it completely circled the back yard. At first, people said Mr. Murdock had invented a special kind of airplane, but later, when it was seen he seldom stayed in the back yard, but only walked through the woods, or waited in front of the store for the mail, it was said he had been sent by the government, to see if anyone was getting too much sugar, or to find out who was dodging the draft. He was from somewhere, vaguely far away, east of the mountains.

It was a long time before Johnny and Dana had nerve enough to crawl through their secret passage to the Murdock house, to find out why the fence had been built. The secret passage went from beneath Johnny's house, under the Murdock house, and came out, at a trap door covered with pieces of wood, in the woodshed behind Dana's house. It was a tunnel that was actually a ditch covered with boards, with dirt thrown over the boards, and they had dug it, when America entered the war, in the hope of a German or a Japanese invasion. It was a failure, both as a secret and as a passage, for the dirt got in their eyes whenever they crawled through it, and it could be plainly seen from above the ground because the rain had cut holes in the dirt over the boards . . . They crawled through it on a hot afternoon earlier in the summer, to the dusty foundations beneath the Murdock house. Lying flat, on the dry, fine-grained soil, they stared out at the strange interior of the fence. The unpainted wood held the sunlight; the light hurt their eyes. Mr. and Mrs. Murdock were sitting on the walk that led to the woodshed, and the baby, a huge, monstrous baby, as large as either of them, and as old, a baby with a head almost as large, it seemed, as all the rest of its body, was crawling slowly around the yard. They sank back into the shadow and the goose-pimples came out all over them. It rolled its great head from side to side as it crawled, and a thread of saliva drained from the corner of its mouth in a fine silver stream. Sometimes its arms gave way, and it would fall, helplessly and soundlessly, lying with its face pressed against the earth until its mother lifted it. They hunched their

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way back, to hide in the pale yellow ferns that grew beneath the house. It saw them, suddenly, and as they backed away it smiled, with a vacant, friendly smile, and started its slow crawl toward them. For a moment they were both paralyzed; they saw Mr. Murdock set his paper aside to peer sharply into the shadow; they saw the mother stand rigid and disturbed in the middle of the yard, watching the child. They scurried backwards to the tunnel, and when they came out to the normal sunlight Johnny's mother glanced at them inquisitively, and after a moment asked them what they were always doing under the house.

This was all, somehow, in the back ground, but it left them with a strained shame and embarrassment whenever they saw Mr. Murdock. It was in Dana's mind now, as he stood beside the man and waited for Johnny to return. What was deeply disturbing was that the baby was as old as they were—as old as Johnny, at any rate—and if it wasn't for some kind of good fortune they might have been the same way. Johnny came back at last, breaking the silence by edging up cautiously and lifting his bucket. "Nothing's in it!" he shouted. Mr. Murdock laughed, and Johnny galloped away again like a pony, kicking his feet sideways through the grass as he ran. Mr. Murdock walked back to the fireplace, where he picked up a piece of wood he had been whittling. He kicked at the bricks, and looked at the grass growing inside the fireplace.

Dana circled around him, to stare at the great grave and the high tombstone. They became strange and important as Mr. Murdock asked, "Who used to live here?"

Dana did not know. He was ashamed because he did not know; because he had never wondered. He thought Mr. Murdock would think he wasn't bright if he confessed he did not know, and he tried to make up a name, but he could not think of one. He kicked his feet through the ashes, looking hard at the twisted nails and the melted glass he uncovered. It was a few moments before Johnny returned, and Mr. Murdock watched him, smiling, as he edged his way back. Johnny stood at the edge of the mound for a time before he shot out his question, shyly and breathlessly, as though he opened and closed a door that gave a brief, bright glimpse of what was going on in his mind. "What's it like," he asked, "east of the mountains?"

Mr. Murdock stared at him.

Dana explained hastily, "We heard you were from east of the mountains."

"What mountains?"

What mountains! They looked at each other and giggled, and then

looked at the smoky blue in the east, peak after peak ending in the white line of snow against the sky. On the relief map it was all smooth dips and ribbed waves, like the pictures of the craters of the moon in the Book of Knowledge. "The Cascades!" they shouted, and Mr. Murdock smiled again.

"Oh, yes," he said. "East of them, and east of the Rockies, and east of the Alleghanies."

"*Yow!*" Johnny said. "*Yow!*" He came up nearer, and Mr. Murdock grinned and slapped him lightly. "What's it like?" he asked again.

Dana felt that he was being left out of it. Mr. Murdock paid no attention to him; he was only looking at Johnny and repeating, "What's it like?" as though he tried to remember. Dana shoved Johnny aside.

"The country is dry and sandy!" he said swiftly. "They have to irrigate! Agriculture is the principal industry!" Mr. Murdock looked at him. "Oh!" he said, and Dana flushed and backed away. He was ashamed; he had been showing off again, and Mr. Murdock knew it. He scattered the ashes beneath his feet with his anger with himself. It always happened. He tried to keep from showing off, but he could not. He could keep quiet for a time; but sooner or later something was said that he knew about, and he could not hold himself back; he had to shout out what he knew. And then it was always the same—people looked at him with displeasure because they thought he had been showing off. He was left to grit his teeth and wish he had kept still. And even now, after Mr. Murdock had said that the people there did not know they were east of the mountains, he had to throw himself forward again, and blurt out, "Spokane is the principal city!"

Johnny came back, after running down the hill, walking pigeon-toed, and pulling the bucket down over his head. "You can see the ocean!" he shouted. "On a clear day!" He meant from the mountains, but Mr. Murdock only lifted his eyebrows in amazement.

"The ocean!" he cried. "What ocean, Johnny?"

What ocean! They kicked each other, and slapped each other, and ran around and around the fireplace. Mr. Murdock began to laugh, and this made it all the funnier; they threw their buckets on the ground, and rolled in the grass, and laughed until they were exhausted. They stretched out on the mound, then, breathing hard, and watching Mr. Murdock. He sat down, a few feet away from them, with his back against the fireplace. "Oh, you're a fine pair!" he said at last. They waited for him to tell them something, but he leaned over to slap Johnny lightly on the leg. "How would you like to be my boy?" he asked.

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They glanced quickly at each other. For a moment nothing happened. Johnny drew his head down between his shoulders, and bent his knees; his feet were tight and springy against the ground. He lifted himself cautiously. When he stood up Mr. Murdock stretched out his long arm and held him by the ankle. "Don't be in such a hurry," he said, grinning again. "Don't you want to be my boy? Wouldn't you like to go east of the mountains with me?"

Dana backed away and stood up.

His eyes had grown misty behind his glasses after all his running, but now he could see clearly again; he could see Mr. Murdock's long arm reaching out of the shadow at the base of the fireplace; he could see the long fingers wrapped tight around Johnny's ankle. He saw Johnny trying to pull away. His foot lifted a few inches from the ground as he tugged at it, and settled back again when he turned to stare at Mr. Murdock.

"No," Johnny said faintly. "No."

Mr. Murdock let him go. "No?" he repeated. It seemed to surprise him. He glanced at Dana, and back at Johnny, who was beginning to shuffle away. "Why? . . ." Mr. Murdock said. "Don't you like me, Johnny? Don't you want to be my boy?"

"No!"

It was loud and sharp. Mr. Murdock laughed. "Oh, come," he said. He reached over and grasped the boy's leg again, pulling him back beside him. "*Let loose!*" Johnny cried. "*Let loose! Let loose!*" He tried to jerk himself away. For an instant he flew through the air as his feet went out from under him. He tried to run while Mr. Murdock still held his ankle, and he fell, with a dull throb, on his face. "Oh, Johnny, I'm sorry!" Mr. Murdock cried. He bent over to lift him. When he touched him Johnny began screaming and kicking, and Dana groped around for a rock. He ran closer, but he could not see; the fine cloud of dust was rising and spreading over them as they threshed around in the ashes. He saw Mr. Murdock lift out of the cloud, and fall on his back, pulling Johnny over on him. He was still kicking and screaming, but now his arm was free, and he was swinging his bucket blindly around him. "Wait," Mr. Murdock gasped. "Wait, son, wait!" He was trying to hold Johnny's arm. There was a hollow, ringing crash as the bucket smashed against his face. Johnny was free. He tried to run, but he tripped over Mr. Murdock's legs and fell again. Mr. Murdock was sitting up, holding his hand over his mouth. The blood was streaming through his fingers and down his arm. "*You little devil!*" he said. "*You little devil!*" He kicked the boy off his legs and stood up. Dana

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threw his rock and ran to the edge of the mound. When he looked back they were running and stumbling over the grass, going around and around the fireplace. The man was swinging his long arms, and kicking out ahead of him. The gray ash foamed up over their knees. "*You little devil!*"... Mr. Murdock said. His voice was a broken, panting whine. They went around and around, until Johnny fell down again. He lay quiet for an instant, drawing his legs and arms up under him, and burying his head, waiting, and then he began to scream, with a high, broken wail of terror, as he clawed at the ashes and kicked his legs out behind him. Mr. Murdock was over him. His leg was drawn back, but he stopped, suddenly, before he kicked, and looked down at the little frenzy of terror that was still clawing and screaming beneath him. The dust rose up in waves. He wiped his hand across his bleeding mouth; he looked dully at Dana; and after a moment he walked away toward the woods.

They waited, afraid to move, until he disappeared. Johnny lifted his head slowly to watch him as he walked away. When he was out of sight they threw a few rocks, feverishly, in the general direction he had taken, and then raced out of the field, toward the hiding safety of the woods, toward the river. The fine ash dust was just beginning to settle on the mound when they stopped, at the far fence, to look back at it.



TWO STORIES

Julian L. Shapiro

I LET HIM DIE

Jasper Darby came downstairs to the kitchen. He banged the ashes off the grate of the woodstove and chucked in a few hunks of timber. After dousing them with kerosene and touching them off with a match he set up a kettle of water to boil. Then he took two milkpails that were hanging on pegs near the door and plodded through the snow to the barn. Itd started to snow late the afternoon before and all night it came down. Now there were six inches of it on everything Darby could see fences manurepiles stones bushes the barn. In all directions the country was white. Darby set the pails in front of the barn and decided that before he went in and milked the cows hed go up the hill and have a look at the string of traps hed set for rabbits. He went around a corner of the

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barn and off on an angle up Bald Hill to the treeline where the traps were. He went to them all but found no fur sign nor any of the traps sprung. Some were snowed under and probably stuck with cold but he let them alone because he might get bit if he fooled around for them under the snow. When he reached the end of the trapline he was on a string with his house and barn. As he started down he found the fresh trail of a mans shoes going his way and he followed the steps wondering how it was he hadnt seen the fellow that made them. When he stopped to take a closer look he saw the tracks mostly wavered and lurched and sometimes there was a dragging from one step to the next. Then Darby went on downhill with the trail again and saw two places where there were big blotches around the prints and handmarks deep in the snow where the man fell and picked himself up again.

The trail led right to the back of Darbys barn. He went in to look for the man and found him sleeping in a haypile. Darby kicked his shoe but the man didnt wake up so the farmer bent down and grabbed his arm and gave it a couple of good jerks. From the tracks in the snow the man couldnt have been there much over an hour but he opened his eyes very slow and looked like he was coming out of a long sleep. First his eyes didnt fix right and wobbled around on his face. It was a good ten seconds before he located Darby. When he saw him he tried to sit up but there wasnt any power in his arms and he couldnt raise himself. Darby just stood there and looked at him.

it was pretty cold in the barn maybe colder than it was outside. The horses and cows were steaming from their mouths and flanks and on the floor between their hind legs there were bunches of brown ice. When the stock moved their legs and touched the frozen manure the whole stack of it slid along the floor in one piece. The stranger was in the hay and some of it was covering him but he didnt have a coat. There were a couple of horse blankets on the wall right in back of him and I cant guess why he didnt use them unless he was so tired when he came in he just flopped down in the hay and lay there like a turd. When I went in and woke him up he could hardly open his eyes and he couldnt sit up. I didnt think he could talk so I went about my chores and didnt see him again till that night.

When Darby went back later the stranger had his eyes open but he was just where hed been in the morning. Darby asked him who he was and what the hell he was doing in his barn. The man didnt answer right away so Darby got a little mad and told him if he wouldnt talk he could pick himself up and move right along. Then the stranger said his name

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was Robine and he was a traveler and Darby asked what he meant traveler. Robine said he just went around from place to place seeing things and Darby said traveler and a pretty fancy name for tramp. Robine said he didnt mind being called that. Darby asked him why he didnt work and Robine said because he didnt want to and it suited him fine just to keep on the move and not miss anything there was to see. Darby said he wondered how he got money for food and what he did when his clothes wore out. Robine said hed hardly ever had more than a couple of bucks in his pants since he quit his wife and that was eighteen years ago. He couldnt stand her any more. Theyd been married for three years and that was plenty and anyhow she got in his way whenever he wanted to go off on a bumming trip and annoyed him by throwing it up that he was shiftless and hed never amount to anything. He didnt want to amount to anything. Darby asked Robine how hed got along all those years if he didnt have any money and Robine said he was lucky once in a while to meet up with pretty decent folk that helped him out with food and maybe an old coat or shirt. Sometimes people gave him things. Sometimes he just got kicked out.

Then Robine got weak and he couldnt talk any more so Darby went back to the house and made supper. By the time he finished washing the dishes it was almost time to go to bed so after smoking a pipe for a while in front of the stove he took a kerosene lamp and went upstairs.

eighteen years moving around and me busting my heart out on that rockpile so tired nights I fell asleep with my face in the plates on the kitchen table.

By morning the snow was near a foot deep. The cold got worse and there was a wind spilling over Bald Hill that shook all the snow out of the trees up there so they stood out brown again and when the wind came down it piled up the snow in high drifts against the house and barn and fences. When Darby got to the kitchen to build a fire and boil water for coffee he found a thick plate of ice on the waterpail that he had to hack in with a poker. After he made the fire and put the water up he went out to the barn to milk the cows. He did all six of them and stored the milk away in cans before going over to the haypile for a look at Robine. That morning Robine was weaker. There were bright red spots on his cheeks and the look on his eyes was hard and flat and he didnt see very clear. Under his eyes he had circles that were pushed in his face like someone had thumbed down coins. He didnt try to sit up. He didnt move at all. Darby said hed wanted to ask Robine the morning before how he happened to be coming off Bald Hill in weather like that without a coat.

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Darby said hed gone in there himself some years back to look for a stray horse and hed traveled a long way without coming across a house or a road. What was his idea. There wasnt anybody in there. Robine just shook his head and didnt say anything.

he didnt ask me for a thing. He didnt even want to talk to me. He had his pride with him no matter if he was a tramp. No work in eighteen years and still too proud to ask for food. Mind you Id have gave him nothing even if he asked because I got no use for his kind but he galled me by laying there looking up at me with his mouth shut and not hearing what I said to him.

Finally Robine said he felt like he was imposing and if he could only walk hed get out and not trouble Darby any more. Darby said Robine could suit himself. He didnt like strangers hanging around his place. While Darby was saying that Robine closed his eyes. The farmer went back to the house so mad that in the evening when he got in the barn with the milkpails he didnt go over to the haypile.

The next morning Darby put on a heavy coat and walked down to the road to see if any maild come through. On his way he found Robine with his face in the snow and frozen stiff. Darby left him there and kept on for two miles through the choked up road to make a report to Smead the sheriff. Smead hitched up a cutter and the two of them went back for Robine. While Darby was putting the dead man in the back of the cutter the sheriff found Robines trail and followed it back to Darbys barn but he didnt say anything about that just then and they drove over to the Covington undertaker with the body. From there Smead telephoned for the Coroner but before he came Darby told the sheriff about Robine. While Darby was talking Smead got sore and stood up over his chair and hed have hit him if the Coroner hadnt come in. When Smead told the story to the Coroner both of them rushed Darby and gave him a few cracks on the jaw and when he tried to fight back they knocked him down. Then the Coroner threatened to have Darby locked up and indicted for the homicide and Smead got the County Attorney on the wire. He came over on the run along with a bunch of the big men of the town. They all made a lot of noise when they heard the story but while that was going on Darby just sat in his chair and said nothing. They were all hollering at him and shaking their fists and there even was talk of tar and feathers. By that time most of the townfolk had got wind of the affair and many of them were still hanging around outside after dozens pushed their way in and lined up along the walls. The Prosecutor was sitting at a table

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and going through the Penal Code to see if he could find a crime to pin on Darby.

maybe its too bad for Robine he struck my farm first on his way down out of the woods. Maybe hed still be alive if he fell in with you Smead but as far as Im concerned Im right glad hes dead and even more that he didnt die on my land. Where he got the strength last night to get up and try to go off down the road I dont know and I dont care. The minute I set eyes on him I knew he was starving but when he told me how hed been living I let him die. He wasnt going to go on living at my expense. Its funny you act like you think his deaths on my head. I let him die all right but Im resting easy about it. All the time he was there and I was talking to him I had those eighteen years in mind. Eighteen years of his play and my work. When Robine told me about that I knew Id let him die.

When the Prosecutor closed his book Darby asked him if hed found something he could be charged with. The Prosecutors told him no and Darby got up and said hed be going along because he had some work to do up to the farm. He didnt get out of there so fast. When the crowd heard Darby couldnt be accused of anything after letting a man starve to death they went for him yelling theyd fix his wagon even if there wasnt any law. They got their hands on Darby and it looked like he was going to get trampled on. He got a few more punches in the head and plenty of kicks while Smead was figuring if he should call a halt. He had a quick talk with the Prosecutor and they agreed it was time to take a hand but it was all Smead and his deputies could do to get Darby away from the crowd.

JASPER DARBYS PASSION

They were all sitting around the Covington store one night not long after the Robine affair and from the way they were talking nothing but Darby for hours on end it wasnt hard to see they were still pretty much excited about him. Sheriff Smead was telling the Robine story again for the benefit of a traveling salesman and everybody was listening just like it wasnt stuff theyd heard ten times over but when Smead got done Nevins Abe Nevins a quiet fellow that never said more than he had to sprung a brand new one on the crowd. He said hed seen it all happen and he knew it was true as gospel because he was living on Darbys farm at the time helping get in the hay and also taking care of the stock.

Nevins said he went in the barn one morning and right inside the door he came across a pair of kittens that hardly had their eyes open. One

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of the kittens was a female all white around the face except for the ears and there the color was bluegray like the rest of its body. The other the tom was gray all over and had black blots with a big one on the left side of its face all around the eye. Nevins looked around for the mother cat but he couldnt find her. It would have been a hard job feeding them by hand and he didnt have the time for it and he supposed Darbyd have no use for the kittens so he decided to drown them and get them out of the way. He put them in a pail and was going over to the pump when Darby came along and asked him what he had in there. Nevins said a couple of kittens he found in the barn and Darby said what you going to do with them. Drown them and Darby said like fun he was. That kind of surprised Nevins because hed never seen Darby pay any more attention to animals than to flies and there were always plenty of flies around that farm Nevins said. Darby stuck his hand in the pail and lifted out the kittens. Theyre kind of pretty Darby said and anyhow when they grow up maybe they can take care of the mice around here. Nevins didnt know what to make of it. He never knew Darby to like animals before and he always half starved his stock and whipped them near to death when they got notions he called it. That business about the kittens making mousers didnt take Nevins in any and it was just that Darby took a fancy to them because they were pretty but most likely hed get sick and tired of them when they started drinking up milk he could sell if he had a mind to. But it wasnt any of Nevins affair if Darby wanted to keep the kittens so he dropped the pail and went back in the barn.

That evening at suppertime before Darby sat down to eat he warmed up some milk in a fryingpan and fed it to the kittens out of a spoon that he shoved way down their throats. It took him quite a while to get enough milk down to keep them alive and by the time he was done his supper was cold but he ate it without making any complaints. Nevins couldnt understand Darby at all. He knew all about him and his character of being a hard man to get along with. He never gave and he never asked for and even though hed been living around Covington all his life Nevins didnt think Darby had a friend in the world. When he was lucky enough to get folks to work on his farm they generally liked him less when they finished than when they started so it looked kind of funny to Nevins Darby fooling around with a couple of kittens like they were babies.

The next few weeks Darby did treat them just like that. The mother cat never came back and he practically had to feed them by hand. They only ate the stuff he gave them and even after they learned to lap it up

out of a bowl they were so used to Darbys being around hed have to stay in the room or else they wouldnt feed because if he went out theyd follow him around the farm like they were dogs. Darby was tickled by that. Once he said hed never seen kittens act that way before and hed watched plenty of them but they were the ordinary farm kind that only knew enough to try to get fat off anybody. Another thing he said was funny with these kittens was if he happened to go out in the morning before seeing them theyd chase all over the farm till they found him and then hang around his heels or rub up against his boots and make noises to get his eye and even try to crawl up his legs so that finally hed have to pick them up and stuff one in each pocket and theyd stay there with their heads sticking out till he went back to the house to get them their milk to start the day off with.

All this time Darby was a changed man Nevins said. He got rid of that gloomy look and most of the hardness wasnt in his eyes any more and sometimes he got real talkative in the evening and spoke to Nevins till long after regular bedtime. There was no sign of him getting tired of the kittens and the fact was it was just the opposite. Every day he seemed to get more attached to them and at the same time he was easier to get along with so Nevins had no kick to make except he still couldnt understand Darbys quick turnabout and that was the reason Nevins never told anybody in town he didnt think theyd believe him.

One day when the kittens were seven or eight weeks old Nevins went in the kitchen to get something and there was Darby standing in the middle of the room holding up a kitten by the scruff in each hand. When Darby saw Nevins he right away dropped the kittens on the floor and went out without talking but as he got in the light at the doorway Nevins saw he had a queer look on his face. Mostly it was like he was surprised and he didnt like the surprise but he hadnt got a chance to get mad yet. Nevins wondered what the hell Darbyd been doing and he couldnt make a blamed thing out of it because for the first time the kittens acted like they were scared of Darby and ran under a woodpile when he let them go out of his hands. Nevins got them out and looked to see if Darbyd hurt them but he couldnt find any marks or sore places except on the belly of the female there was a spot that was wet but he couldnt see what that had to do with Darby.

Later that afternoon Nevins caught them at it in the barn and found out. The female was trying to feed the tom from her nipples. Of course she didnt have any milk but that didnt stop her from trying to give it or the tom from trying to get it and there he was working his mouth away

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like a baby sucking an empty bottle. Nevins thought theyd stop by themselves when they got fullsize and started making trips at night. Then he thought of Darby finding the kittens doing that in the kitchen and the shock he must have had.

That night when Darby and Nevins were sitting around after supper the kittens started again right in front of them. As soon as Nevins saw what was going on he looked at Darby and saw his face getting a thin look on it and his mouth flattened out wide and his eyes were coming like out of cracks. Finally Darby couldnt stand it any more so he picked up a coffee can and chucked it at the kittens and they ran out of the room. Nevins wanted to know what was his idea chucking a can at the kittens and Darby gave him a look like he wanted to kill him and he was so excited he couldnt talk.

Next night the kittens pulled the same stunt and Darby was watching for it. He went over to where they were and booted them clear across the room. The tom landed against the corner of a box and had one of his paws cut. The female went right to the wall and lay there in a ball like her back was broke. Nevins jumped up and said he had a good mind to bowl Darby over and kick his face in and the only thing stopped him was he guessed Darby must be a little bit crazy but anyhow Nevins told him if he ever made another move against the kittens hed go get a hayfork and put it right through the seat of Darbys pants. Darby was pretty hot too and said since when was Nevins telling him how to run the farm. The kittens were his and by God hed do what he felt like and if he thought they were doing wrong hed take care of that and not ask for advice from a hired man. Nevins said he had no right to own kittens if he was going to treat them that way and as for that part about the hired man as far as he was concerned he thought a damn sight more of the kittens than he did of the job and Darby rolled in one and if Darbyd give him his wages hed get his things and go and be glad to be quit of him because it was easy to see Darby was still the same fellow hed always been and it was no wonder nobody liked him. Darby didnt need Nevins any more so he said if Nevins wanted to go thatd suit him right down to the ground and hed give him his money the next day. After that he went out and Nevins got busy fixing up the kittens. The female came around after a couple of minutes but Nevins had to soak the toms leg in warm water and then bandage it and he felt bad when he watched the kitten trying to get around on three legs when it couldnt bite the bandage off.

The next morning was the finish. While Nevins was packing his stuff he heard a shot and he ran downstairs to see what was doing. Darby

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had a shotgun in his hands and not far away from him the kittens were rolling around in the grass but pretty soon they stopped rolling and just lay there and Nevins knew they were dead. He was so mad he reached down for a rock to brain Darby with but the farmer covered him with the shotgun and said if he tried anything hed get the other barrel in his belly. Then Darby pulled some bills out of his pocket and chucked them at Nevins saying he could go if he promised not to do anything. Darby had such a crazy look on his face there was no telling what hed do and anyhow the kittens were dead and there was no use arguing so Nevins promised. Darby put up the gun and Nevins went over to pick up the kittens. While he was digging a hole to put them in he asked Darby why hed killed them and Darby said on his farm he couldnt allow any goings on like that.



POEM

Harry Roskolenkier

Some have names denoting the natural bent;
names of fruit, trees and flowers—
and the wind; sounds of spurious origin

Some origins are from carefully managed stolid homes,
like New England, former peasants of the rich loam of centuries—
ground into the sea and earth to be fruitful again:
wheat from the loam, the gain of early settlers
in the earlier cosmos that went before I came

The visions allotted the spherical orbs of my eyes;
people are menaced with doubts and with doubts they die;
souls of svelte sweetness, connoting the acid tang
of experience, connoting the days and the evenings
of the winter—and the seasons all certain

All groomed with the centuries; in the summer
the same heat as the summer before—
and our years maudlin with satire—
in the gloom of our riches and ire.



NEW UNION

J. Railford Watkins

Jed turned over in bed lazily. He grabbed his pillow with a wide sweep of one arm, and squeezed his eyes shut; not for long. The sun was over the horizon, and coming up over Jed's window sill. It struck full in his face, and Jed turned over again. With his right hand he pulled the pillow up against his face until it all but smothered him, and with his left he pulled up the sheet, which bared his legs simultaneously with the submergence of his eyes. Five minutes he lay there, his mind in that half-active state that just precedes awakening. Next on the daily overture was a slow lifting of the legs and extending of them to remove the thin covering with the least possible effort. He rolled twice, let his legs hang out of the bed, and pushed himself up with an elbow.

Shoulders drooped and arms hanging limp as his big hands fell into his lap, Jed observed the side of a wall that was bare except for the rafters which formed a rough paneling in his garret room. For a few minutes he sat there and pouted. Too much sleep is almost as bad as too little.

Five minutes later, in brogans and bare ankles, khaki dungarees and blue shirt, Jed descended the rough stairway that led down into the principal room of Pap's abode. A splashing of water finished the job of awakening him, and slowly scraped off his cheeks with the side of his hand, it dropped down over shirt and trousers.

Jed sauntered out to the barn, forcibly removed a cow from the entrance as he opened the big door, and went about the job of lining up feed buckets preparatory to milking. This job completed, the mules and horses fed, and slop poured to the hogs, he returned to the kitchen, moving faster now, and to breakfast.

"Pap," he said between hot cakes, "which one uv the mules you gonna give me?"

"Old Black, I expeck," responded the old man after some thought. "He ain't the best un in th' bunch, but you won't hafter whip him to work. I expeck I better keep Jinny."

"How 'bout the cows?"

"Any two you want, an' any bull."

"You gonna give me some chickens?"—a serious manner showed in the boy's countenance now.

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"He'p yourself," was the answer. Pap was studying the boy's expression.

"When can I move 'em, Pap?"

"Go to it any time you wanna," said the older man. "That is, if you got the work started."

"Yassir," said Jed, showing the first eagerness of his day. "Barn work's done, and th' niggers is started in th' fields. I do' wanna move the things till tomorrow, though. I got work to do this mornin'. I'll be back purty soon to plow. That nigger Bill is gonna be awright in the barn work. He ain't much on milkin' but he'll learn."

Jed ate five minutes longer, then arose from the table and took down his old straw hat from a peg over the door. He rubbed it into place on the back of his head, and opened the door.

"When you gonna git . . . git . . ." the old man started, but when Jed turned around to hear the question, Pap was looking intently at the huge slice of bread which he was wiping across his syrup-smeared plate. Pap said no more. The old man was proud and always said to himself that sentiment was not a part of him. It was kind of foolish, he thought; soft. But then Jed was the only child, and there are parts of Georgia where most couples, without ceremony of any kind, merely move into a house together and begin the rearing of a family. Pap was wondering. He never would have admitted it, even to himself, but he worried about it.

"I dunno," the boy answered, and was gone.

His slender body swung forward with every step, and his knees had a tendency to remain bent, even the slightest bit, when he walked. He had learned to walk almost in the plowed furrow; plow handles had caloused his big hands, and constant sun had caused his eyes to squint. Bucolic, he was, every inch of him.

He pushed his massive feet through the sand of the town road, heedless of the sun that was fast scorching the day. Three miles down the highway he went, to the wide, low gate that admitted him to the yard in the midst of which squatted his new house.

With all the pride of creation, Jed stood in front of that shack, and beamed. Head cocked to one side and then the other, Jed surveyed his work. Eyes roamed from the bedroom on the left to the dining room on the right. There was a parlor, too, in the center of the house, and behind that the dairy, with six steps leading up into the dwelling. A long spade had taken this floor down to a depth cool enough to preserve the milk and cream. Behind the dining room was the kitchen, already lined with pots

and pans, a barrel of flour, a sack of water-ground meal, two massive sides of bacon—everything that makes a kitchen.

The range that came from Chicago was already set up, and beside it was a sink, with a drain pipe that ran down through the floor and out to the creek. Behind the bedroom was a screened porch for summer. That garret in Pap's house was pretty stuffy in the hot months.

But the barn was not finished. Everything was there but the roofing. The barn had suffered from the grandeur of the house. After all, a barn could be only a barn, and the house was the next thing to a real city bungalow. Jed had stopped work on the cow stalls to install the kitchen stove, halted the swinging of big doors to haul in the provisions from Pap's storehouse, stopped shoveling the floor smooth long enough to put up the beds when they arrived by truck from the depot. Thus, the dwelling was completed before the more provincial building was well started.

Now, however, the job was nearly done. The roofing would take two more days, with the time that he was allowed every day from Pap's farm. He climbed up to the roof and set doggedly to the task.

All that afternoon he plowed Pap's corn, and he was too tired at supper time to talk. Kerosene lamp in hand, he clambered up to the garret soon after nightfall. He dropped his clothes where he stood after pulling the buttons loose, and sat on the side of the bed a while, thinking; there were dreams that he would not have interpreted to even himself in solitude.

Three days later, each a duplicate of the first, Jed asked Pap at dinner time if he might borrow the wagon that afternoon. Pap looked up sharply and gulped. He opened his mouth to speak, withdrew the word, and applied himself diligently to the boiled dinner. A few minutes later he dropped his fork. He arose and went toward the kitchen.

"Ef you wanna," he mumbled back over his shoulder.

He had noticed for the first time that Jed had on his new blue trousers and his Sunday shoes. There was no tie, but the clean shirt was buttoned up to the collar.

"I'll bring it back tonight," Jed said as he went out.

It was eight miles to town, and Jed had to whip the horses up to make it in an hour. At the Postoffice, he asked "ef there wuz a package er sump'm" for him, "fr'm Chicago." There was, a well wrapped box, one inch square, and Jed parted with four dollars and eighty-five cents for it.

Back in the wagon which was hitched on the side street just around the corner from the Postoffice, Jed inverted his straw sun hat in his lap.

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He pushed both hands and the box down into the crown of the hat, and pulled at the binding string. He unfolded a small gold band, eyed it admiringly after jerking his head around to be sure that nobody else was looking down into the hat with him, and blushed as he tried to put it on his little finger. It just did encircle the nail. Jed put it back into the blue plush and quickly put the box into the breast pocket of his shirt. A safety pin secured it there. Jed whipped up the horses.

A half-mile from the Pearson's house, he slowed the horses to a walk, removed the pin from his breast pocket, and patted it to be sure that the box was still there. The team walked leisurely into the Pearson's yard. Katie was on the back porch, but came on through the house to the front when she heard Jed stop the horses.

"Where you been?" she asked casually, as if she didn't care.

"Nowheres."

"Did them mules git awright?"

"Yeah."

Katie sat down on the top step of the front porch. She leaned over and scrawled figures on the dusty step with a finger. Her gingham dress touched the top of her low-heeled shoes, hiding any attractiveness of form that might or might not have been Katie's. Her straw-blonde hair was bobbed, but cosmetics had never kept the sun from her face, and it glowed.

"You 'bout ready?" Jed asked from his perch on the wagon.

"You . . . you mean . . . now?" Katie did not lift her head.

"Un-hunh. Didn' you say today?"

"I reckon so."

She got up and went into the house. She returned in a few minutes to the wagon and handed up a big suitcase. Jed threw it into the back of the wagon and reached down to help Katie up.

"Wait a minute," she said: "I got to go tell Ma."

She was gone about five minutes, and the time wore on Jed. He fidgeted on the seat, and felt the breast pocket of his shirt twice. He tied both his shoe strings and fussed at the horses. Katie came back and got into the wagon without aid as Jed fumbled with a loose bolt on the dashboard. She sat on the seat beside Jed, and he jerked at the lines as a signal to the horses that he was ready to go. The team was turned down the Bankton road.

As they turned, Katie looked up and said, "Pa says the' ain't no need to go to th' parson."

Jed stopped the horses and sat immovable. He looked straight ahead, without expression.

"I'd druther," he said.

"Me, too."

Jed whipped up the horses again.

After a few minutes, Katie asked Jed, "What does yo' Pap say?"

"He don't say nothin'," the boy answered. "He jes' thinks." Then, a few minutes later: "He'll be awonderin'."

It was nearly dark when they got back to the new home, and the horses were pulling their feet along behind them instead of pushing them forward as they had earlier in the afternoon. A colored boy opened the gate and Jed drove directly up to the house.

"This's it."

Katie looked long at it. She turned around sideways on the seat, partly to see the home better, and partly to hide her delight. Her gray eyes strayed down to the little gold circle on her finger—a gold circle intermittently broken by the glitter of chip stones—and back to the house.

"It ain't much," said Jed.

"It's . . . it's better'n the Mims's house," Katie disputed. "It's better'n anybody else's."

"I reckon it'll do for a while," Jed answered. He hid behind a sober countenance. "You think it's awright?"

Katie could not restrain herself any longer. Years of stern self-discipline proved futile in this new freedom, this independence which hinged upon her dependence on her man.

"I ain't never seen one that good before!" she said. "Does . . . does it belong to . . . *us*?"

"Yeah. You gawn in an' cook supper. I got to feed the pigs."

"We got pigs, *too*?"

"Yeah. 'N I got to take Pap's wagon back."

Pap's dining room and kitchen were deserted. The table was set with one place, but the supper had not been touched. Grits slowly congealed and scrambled eggs dried up as they cooled. The fried bacon seemed to weld itself to the platter. The coffee had long since ceased to steam. Pap's cook, bewildered, for Pap had never before refused to eat, left by the back door without a sound. Something about him seemed to dismiss her without a word.

There on the front porch from where he had watched the sun drop behind the trees, Pap remained, slumped into the old rocker. Motionless, he sat, and gazed off across the fields which stretched out before him on

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the other side of the road, stretched back to the wood which had curtailed daylight. If there was an expression, it was of fear. The aged eyes were not sure that they saw, and Pap shivered slightly, as if with a chill.

When Jed arrived, the old man moved not a muscle. The wagon clattered up through the yard and around the house. Pap's head remained fixed, but his weary old eyes followed the boy until he passed from sight around to the back yard.

Jed sauntered back toward the front porch.

"You awright, Pap?"

"Yeah," said the old man, speaking with a great weariness in his voice. "I reckon so. You . . . you git done?"

"Yassir. We done moved in."

Pap's hands slowly gripped the arms of his chair, and he remained seated and outwardly calm, but with difficulty.

"You . . . you . . . got to th' parson?"

"Yassir," Jed answered. He was embarrassed, but relieved. "We'd druther, an' I thought you'd druther."

"Didn' make no difference," said Pap.

But his grip on the chair arm relaxed, and when Jed said good bye and started out of the yard and down the town road, the old man's form slowly straightened, gained strength. His eyes gradually filled and became blurred. Although nobody was there to see, Pap quickly wiped them and reproached himself for a softy.

A few minutes longer he sat, then he arose slowly and went in to supper. Satisfaction, and pride, radiated from him. He did not notice that the supper was cold.



BY WAY OF PROLOGUE

Sherry Mangan

OPVS I

They are the little men
who love it is a woman's work

perceive the little men my freezing wish
going to paradise in a pretty pink bandwagon

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and lest I should too much reflect upon
the girls in the new evening
letting down their hair for the young men
or on the hungry self of love
smite white bright light
cleanse sharply me that I may
into kept night these lesser fancies
seriously fling

the spinning charms the spinner and the work
accomplished feeds his body it is enough.

SECRETA

This as the last that when
the blue sky broken like the brittle ice
of early fall hysterically tinkles
into timespace I can be there
hooded and tranquil watchful and at ease
wrapped in the gathered robe of thought unspeaking
true to the grandeur of the final flame

thus sings the starkness beyond epigram
thus solely flames the motivating thought
yet in the poisonous meeting of desires
when in his wearing oxyphagic time
is aided by his tearing minionettes if then
the homing velocity of a mated gull betray
his temporal beauty o then then
harshly let me remember this latter grandeur
grant me its visual spark.



REFRESHMENT

Francis Butterworth

It had been a week of bad weather with almost constant rain. Buck Weaver and his wife, Ellen, who were spending their summer vacation in the country, were restless. To pass the time Ellen went in for phono-

graph records and solitaire; Buck read until he was light-headed. He laid another book face downward on the stack of books he had begun and lifted the reproducer arm from the spinning record. He sang:

"Diversion, diversion, I cry
If I don't get diversion
I surely will die."

Ellen frowned and he added, "We've got to do something. I'm going cuckoo."

"Do you want to drive back to New York?"

"Do I want some traffic? Nice mileage today?"

"Then sit it out. There's no use in running away—we've talked that before. And the weather will break." Ellen was hopeful.

"Every day tomorrow." Buck made a face. "Look, I smile an exasperated-but-submissive smile. We're only schoolteacher vacationists being rained upon. What's that? and that's what? Nothing to complain about."

"Go ahead, be destructive. You'll feel better."

"Nothing to complain about." Buck went over to the corner cupboard and got out an empty bottle. He uncorked it and inhaled deeply. "Let's go over to Old Trumbull's and get some applejack." He put the bottle under Ellen's nose but she turned away.

"I'm just as depressed as you are; but it makes me sore with myself. I don't want to drink; I want to sit and sit as a penance for feeling this way."

That was the way to act, sure; make one final adjustment to this life in the country; but Buck had the smell of applejack in his nose. "A couple of drinks will loosen us up," he argued.

"I'll go—it will be good to get out and see someone human. Mr. Trumbull is so sweet and so well weathered. We might get a broiler for tomorrow," she added.

"Put your hand in mine," Buck said oratorically, "and a little bottle shall lead us."

"You're getting gay too soon; don't force it."

By the time they reached Old Trumbull's farm Ellen was more amenable. "It's good to get out," she declared. "I was so blue, I was wallowing in it." As they drove into the farmyard they saw an old Ford with a sagging top. They drove up beside it. "That's the mate for our wagon," Buck said. Ellen surveyed the two cars. "Aren't they two disreputable creatures. You feel the country had made them its own."

"You sound better," Buck said. He slapped her backsides playfully. "Quit," she cried, dodging. "There's someone on the porch."

Old Trumbull was there with a natty young lady whom he introduced as his daughter-in-law. "I'm trying to get Marilyn to explain why she uses that lipstick stuff," he said.

Marilyn was pouting. "He's teasing me. He don't know anything about 'it.'" She thumbed the mirror of her compact and inspected her lips.

Buck joined the game. "It all depends upon the flavor," he said, winking at Old Trumbull.

"Ed likes it," Marilyn said. "He likes me to beauty up."

At that moment Ed Trumbull came out of the house carrying two jars of milk. He nodded to Buck and Ellen. He was a tremendous fellow with a serious red face; he wore a new yellow slicker stenciled with a bathing beauty across the back. "I'm going to take your car down and have the tires pumped up," he said to his father. Old Trumbull did not look up nor reply. Without waiting for an answer Ed walked away.

"He takes care of Papa Trumbull's car," Marilyn explained, "now Mae's away."

"He's the only one that uses it. I can't drive one of them things and I ain't going to learn." Old Trumbull spoke sharply.

Marilyn was round-eyed and earnest. "Ed says if he don't drive it the battery'll go down."

"For all of me, it can sit there. I don't fancy automobiles."

Marilyn turned to Ellen. "What make is your car?" she said brightly. "Ed says we can't afford a big car."

Ellen laughed. "Our's is antique Buick."

"It's better than ours," Marilyn said.

Old Trumbull got up and buttoned his leather jacket. "I'll get your broiler. You come at the right time, she's getting one, too," he said, indicating Marilyn.

Buck lay in the hammock and watched Marilyn as she talked to Ellen. So that was what the Trumbulls were coming to. He recollected Old Trumbull's daughter, Mae, and her passionate outburst earlier in the summer. "Our Ed's a fool. He married a half-wit. He brought her here but all she did was lie in bed and cry." Mae was a great, strong girl, a stalwart like Ed. And Buck and Ellen had decided, at the time, that it was only family feeling—anger that Ed had not stayed on the farm instead of taking a job mending road for the county. But now Buck

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agreed with Mae. Where did Ed find her? She was like a cheap doll—a random eyed creature. Probably Ed's idea of a city wife—a wish fulfillment of a countryman.

Ellen was keeping the conversation going. "You live in Yorktown?" she asked.

"Yes. Right on the main street. The third house on the right as you drive in."

"We've taken the old Butler place. You know it?"

Marilyn made a mouth. "I'll say. Ed wanted to rent that place when we were married. But I wasn't going to be stuck up there on a back road with him away at work all day. I'd go crazy."

Buck sniffed. "You and me, both," he said to himself. "Not if I know it." It irritated him to think that his restlessness made him akin to her. What a thought! Marilyn and Buck, rose-Marilyn . . . rosemary and rue. "Well, I'm the rue," Buck laughed to himself.

Old Trumbull came back with the broilers. He fetched a kettle of boiling water from the kitchen and, laying the broilers in a dishpan, poured it over them, sousing them up and down. "This is the part of the chicken business I don't like—cleaning them," he said as he began to pluck one. Buck took the other; the feathers came off easily and he enjoyed working with Old Trumbull. The old man was fast and Buck tried to keep up with him. By the time they had finished Ed returned. Again he stood towering over his father. "We'll be down again Thursday," he announced. Old Trumbull nodded his head without looking up at his son. This time it was evident that he wished to display his indifference to what his son said or did. Ed looked down at the top of his father's head but he gave no sign of being angry. He and Marilyn said goodby and they went down to their car. As they drove off Marilyn waved to them. Ellen raised her hand in answer. "There we are," she said to Buck. That was a cliché of their private speech equivalent to "Well well." Old Trumbull looked at her questioningly and Buck intervened. "No," he said, "here we are." He took the bottle out of his coat pocket.

Later they sat and drank in the little stone building which Old Trumbull had built to house his cider: Buck and Ellen on a carpenter's horse; Old Trumbull on the side of a barrel. The air was thick with the musty odor of old fermentations. Through it rose the slight perfume of the fresh breath of alcohol. From the doorway they could see two cows that stood waiting to be let into the barn. There was the constant noise of the rain. Old Trumbull poured another round.

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"We've been mouldy," Buck said, raising his glass. "This past week . . ."

"You got the cure for that right in your hand." One of the cows put its head in at the door and Old Trumbull made a swipe at it. "Scat," he cried. The cow put its head down and pranced away, its milk bag swinging. Buck and Ellen laughed. "Like a great big puppy," Ellen said.

Buck finished off his drink. "Scat." He repeated the word. "That's great."

"What's the frame around the cow's neck," Ellen asked.

"That's a poke. She's a great jumper and that stops her."

"A poke," Ellen said. "You have nice names in the country."

"That's just the way I feel," Buck said. "'The cow jumped over the moon'." He laughed and, when he saw that they didn't, he went on, "Well, I think it's funny."

"A poke bonnet," Ellen said, and Old Trumbull nodded.

"Check," said Buck. "I missed that one."

An old foxhound came in and snuffed about them. It was very wet and its fur was grained by the water. Ellen picked it up, holding it off from herself. "Isn't he battle-scarred."

"He's going blind," Old Trumbull said. "I'll have to shoot him one of these days."

Buck took the dog. "Tip, you hear what's going to happen to you. Better take care of your health."

"Getting so you can't have a dog around here anyway," Old Trumbull said. "They get to running the foxes and that real estate fellow up in back shoots 'em when they come on his place."

"How awful," Ellen patted the dog. "Can't you do anything about it."

Old Trumbull shook his head.

"The city's climbing right up your back. It won't be long now." Buck put the dog down.

"When I get my price I'll sell." Old Trumbull spoke as if he believed that day far off, as if he was secure behind the barrier of price that he had erected.

"Do you feel bad about the idea of going—giving up—?" Ellen asked.

Old Trumbull put his chin out. "I can't say I do."

"But it's a better life here," Ellen insisted. "Or don't you think so?"

Old Trumbull was reflective. "There ain't no money in farming. And I've had my fill of it all my life—work from morning to night and

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no end to it. I can't say it's a better life. Time was, twenty years ago, yes, ten years ago, all the land about us was taken up in farms—good farms. A man could get a fine living out of one of them. Thirty or forty cows on a place. But that time is gone."

"I suppose I'm sentimental about it," Ellen said. "The country . . . farming . . ."

"Big vendue—vendue," Buck called out. "Trumbull farm vendue. And by the way," he added, "I want to buy that flail of yours. Hang it up over our fireplace as a relic."

"Don't, Buck," Ellen protested. "You make it so imminent.—We'll hate to see you go. You're our one bright spot."

"Oasis," Buck said.

"I aint gone yet." Old Trumbull got up and sighted Ellen's glass, pretending to shade his eyes with his hand. "Time to sweeten it?"

Ellen shook her head.

"Sure?" he asked. "I always say to keep a lady's glass full. Some of 'em gets shy if they have an empty one."

"Not me. I'm beginning to feel quite wild. If I take any more, I'll be up dancing on the head of a barrel."

"You finish that, I've got something special for you." He took the glass from her and went out to rinse it under the rainspout.

"Do you feel any better," Ellen asked.

"Grand," said Buck.

"Isn't he sweet, though?"

"I like the way he stands. Comes up out of the ground like a tree—an apple tree."

Old Trumbull came back shaking the last drops of water from the glass. They watched him as he went to a small keg and drew off a pale yellow liquor in it.

"There's a hell of a lot of weather in the country," Buck said. "Think of all the vacationists being rained upon. Isn't that cheerful." He laughed.

Old Trumbull handed the glass ceremoniously to Ellen. "There's something you've never had before, I bet." She tasted of it and looked at him with surprise. "It's wonderful," she murmured and drank some more. "Nice—nice, so mellow and smooth." Old Trumbull smiled with pleasure. Buck tasted of it. He took a mouthful and rolled it on his tongue. "Marvellous," he said. "What is it?" Old Trumbull accepted their appreciation in silence. He brought them another glass and watched as they sipped it. Finally he announced, "That's metheglum."

"Metheglum?" they repeated after him.

"Wine made from honey. Five years old it is."

"Sounds Greek," Ellen said.

"Druidical," Buck ventured. "It's certainly an extraordinary word to hear in what might be called suburbs of New York."

"A rare name and a rare drink, Mr. Trumbull," Ellen said. She was flushed and spoke quickly. "It just goes to show what the country can produce."

Buck was feeling fine. He leaned back against a barrel and watched Ellen as she let the last drops fall from the glass into her mouth. Old Trumbull offered some more but Ellen refused. "It's too precious. Save it for another occasion." She turned to Buck. "It is an occasion." He laughed. "We're going good," he said.

Old Trumbull insisted that they have another round of applejack. "You need something strong to cut the dampness," he said. He set the bottle down heavily.

"It's well you have a pinch bottle," Buck said.

Old Trumbull looked fixedly at Buck. He smiled. "I guess I can hold on to any bottle till it's empty."

"Buck, you were going to ask Mr. Trumbull about that game."

"Oh, yes. Do you know the game of 'barley buck'?"

"'Buck, buck, how many heads are up'? That it?"

"No, it's a game you play with your hands." Buck finished off his drink and illustrated. "You've seen Dagoes playing it." He put up fingers and began to shout. "Uno, due, cinque, Tutta La Mora."

Old Trumbull pounded on his knee and laughed immensely. "What's the matter?" Buck asked. He turned to Ellen. "Do I sound foolish?"

"You looked so serious, my dear."

"Well, I feel foolish and I want to be foolish." He stood before Old Trumbull. "Come on, play you a game of barley buck. Hey?" The old man waved him off.

"Sit down, Buck," Ellen called. "You're getting out of order."

"Ssh! Throw some fingers up and I'll throw mine up. Then see who guesses."

"No, no. I'm not much of a hand at games," Old Trumbull said.

Buck laughed. "You're all right; you're good. Making puns. Did you get that crack about the hand, Ellen?"

"Yes, I got it. Come here and sit down."

Buck took Old Trumbull by the hand. They looked at each other and each began to smile. "Metheglum," Buck said.

"Metheglum," Old Trumbull repeated after him.

Outside, one of the cows bellowed. The sudden noise came in upon them. "Whee," Ellen said. She put her hand to her heart. "That scared me. Seems as if the poor lady wanted to be milked."

The second cow took up the cry. "Bellow away," Old Trumbull said. "I'll milk you when I'm ready."

"Drunk or sober?" Buck squinted at him through his glass.

"Drunk or sober, makes no difference." It was getting dark and Old Trumbull got up unsteadily and lighted a lantern. Buck saw his eyes, red rimmed and watery, as he held the lantern up to regulate the wick. Buck pointed at him and said, "We're boiled and I mean you, too."

"I'm all right," Old Trumbull asserted. "Applejack never made me drunk."

"Sure you're all right. Why not." Buck put his arm around Ellen. "We're all all right."

A cow bellowed again and the noise made them silent. Ellen held up her wrist for Buck to see the time. "The significance of it," he said.

"Yes, but it's late. Mr. Trumbull has all his chores to do. And then he has his supper to get."

"You needn't worry about me." Old Trumbull put in. "I've got the chickens fed and it won't hurt the cows to miss a milking."

"Not milk the cows—that sounds like treason," Ellen said. "You see, Buck, we must go." She took their bottle and broiler. "My maternal instinct is aroused," she added, "I must care for you two." Buck stood up unwillingly. "Got to go, now," he said. "Mournful though it be."

Old Trumbull held out his bottle coaxingly. Buck and he had one more drink. "Don't you trouble about them cows," he said to Ellen. "I'm thinking about drying them off. I wish now I had sold them with the others. Would have got a better price." He raised his glass in a silent toast as if to certify his remarks. "Forty years more and mud in your eye all the way," Buck replied. They stood in the doorway looking out into the dusk. The cows came up close. Buck looked at their great sad faces. Forfeits, he thought, forfeits that Old Trumbull had given himself against that last vendue day.

"The wind's changing," Old Trumbull remarked.

Buck wet his forefinger and stuck it out of doors. "What was it before?" he said with a laugh. He was getting good and drunk.

"You must come for dinner soon, Mr. Trumbull," Ellen was saying. "You always promise . . ."

"Bring Mae if she gets back," Buck cut in. Ellen looked annoyed

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at his interruption and he said with extreme politeness, "Pardon me, my dear."

Ellen paid no attention to him. "Yes, do. I think Buck is stuck on her."

"I am," Buck said. "But I'm winking when I say it—to avoid complications. I love to look at her. She's such a great, big, swell girl. She looks like a Michael Angelo—so you know what a Michael Angelo looks like."

"She ain't coming back," Old Trumbull said. There was a sudden hardness in his voice.

Buck grunted. Now what had he started? He tried to turn Old Trumbull from his seriousness, saying in mock reproof, "I never thought you had family quarrels."

"It ain't no family quarrel." Old Trumbull was dogged. "She got ideas in her head that she was too good for housework. Along in the spring she just stopped: never got my meals, never cleaned up, never even made my bed."

"We didn't know; we hadn't realized," Ellen murmured. Old Trumbull's story made her uncomfortable and she signaled to Buck to go.

"I put up with it as long as I could. One day I said to her, 'I guess I need a cook.' And she said, 'All you need is your drunken friends.' 'Drunken friends,' I said, 'I guess I don't need you'."

Buck interrupted. "Well, you got your drunken friends. Here we are."

Old Trumbull stared at Buck, and Ellen took advantage of the pause. She wanted to get the old man away from his recital of injuries. "What is she doing now?" she said, trying to make her question seem natural and easy.

Old Trumbull took the newspaper that the broiler was wrapped in and pointed to a picture marked with black crayon. "She sent me that," he said. He held up the lantern for them to see and, as they looked, he continued his indictment. "She got the idea that I ought to turn the place over to her. Let her farm it and me do the housework. I may not be able to chew my meat but I ain't come to that yet."

The picture showed Mae, broad and imposing, in a white dress, holding a bow and arrow. The caption read: "Miss Mae Trumbull conquers in women's archery tournament." The paper was the Kingston Evening Herald.

"She looks stunning in city clothes," Ellen said. "I hadn't realized they would become her so. Had you, Buck?"

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Buck followed her lead. "Well, I don't know. Take your own case for instance." As he spoke he felt that he and Ellen were foolish to try to sidetrack the old man.

But Old Trumbull would not accept any such casual reference to Mae. "She's upstate staying with her cousins," he said. "When they get tired of keeping her she'll learn what it is to make her own way. Then she won't turn up her nose at what she had here. It ain't the first time she's gone; but it's the last."

As Buck listened he became aware of Old Trumbull's rigidity. He could see the old man's point of view—he could see right around it and see Mae's too. It was all economic. Mae wanted a farm; she was built for it. She wanted something to tie to. Her father was getting old—he might sell out. And if she waited for him to die, then the rest of the family would step in. That was it. The country was fast being gobbled up by the city. Old Trumbull was secure and Mae wasn't. Couldn't blame the girl. "She seems to be doing pretty well so far," he said.

Old Trumbull blinked. "Shootin' arrows," he said.

"Now, Mr. Trumbull," Ellen protested with a laugh.

Buck and Ellen watched him as he made up his mind to speak. He began slowly but they could sense his anger. He would deliver himself no matter how much they tried to avoid it. "She thought I'd send for her," he said. "She thought I couldn't get along without her. But she's got another think coming. This is my place, here—and I ain't going to have her or anybody else telling me what to do. I can get along without her. I'll never take her back. I tell you," he stopped to end impressively—"she's never going to darken my door again."

They sat in silence after that. Old Trumbull had prevailed. Finally he said as if to offer them one last challenge, "I don't have to take any lip from anybody." Ellen drew a deep breath. "Of course," she said. Buck nodded his head gravely.

After Old Trumbull had put the cows in the barn and locked up his cider house they walked over to the car. Then there was a hesitation while they fumbled to find the right quality for parting. Buck recalled the departure of Marilyn and Ed, and he waited for Ellen to speak. She was very formal. She shook Old Trumbull's hand and said, "It was awfully nice—a lovely party." That was a hell of a way for a party to end, Buck thought. He followed Ellen's example, however. "Swell," he said. As they drove off Old Trumbull held up the lantern and waved to them.

"After all I feel sorry for him," Ellen said, looking back.

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"Yeh?" Buck said. "'Never darken my door'. The old-fashioned, hard-hearted parent. Don't you worry about him. He's tough."

"He's been so nice to us. I have an affectionate feeling for him."

"So have I; but this denunciation business—no, that's out of style. He ought to know better." Buck stopped the car and got out the bottle. "Forget it," he said. "We'll start our party where his left off." He and Ellen each had a drink. He held the bottle with his knees and switched off the lights. The darkness fell upon them. "Doesn't that turn off the rest of the world," he said.

They sat with their arms around each other. After a long time Ellen raised her head and whispered, "Would you ever say that to me?"

"Say what?"

"About the door."

Buck laughed. "Goose."

"I know, but it sounded so real."

"It was pure theatre." He added, "If ever I get that way, kick me in the pants."

Ellen sighed and turned on the lights. "It's just nice to know how dark it is."

They started off again. When they came to the hill that hid Old Trumbull's from the turnpike the car began to labor up the muddy road. Buck waited until it began to stall before he threw it into second. "The nick of time," he cried. "Consider the pleasure I feel at being opportune. The simple pleasures of the drunken." They came to the top of the hill. Buck let the car coast. It went, silently, with increasing speed down the short side. The rain was a solid sheet of water on the windshield.

"Careful," Ellen called.

"Isn't this swell," Buck shouted.

They coasted along a level stretch. "The wheels make such a nice sound in the mud," Ellen said.

They rolled out on the turnpike and Buck hurried the car along.

"White rain," Ellen said, pointing. "In the headlights."

Buck laughed. "White rain. Ho, ho!"



AFTER-IMAGE

Erskine Caldwell

I don't know how the thing came about. It just happened that way. One moment I was standing beside her with my hand on her arm, and the next moment she was gone. A thing like that can be an occurrence, an event, a tragedy, or merely the final act of living. I don't know what this was; but she was gone.

She had been standing beside me, her hands on the rail, looking out across the Sound. There was no mist in the air, and the stars were near and bright; but the lights on the shore seemed to be a long way off.

"They told me I could never see her again," she said. "Then they shut the door and left me alone on the porch. I couldn't stay there forever. I left."

But there is no sense in my trying to repeat what she said. I can't remember everything, and most of it was unspoken. She had not even started at the beginning. The first words she had said were: "I was nineteen when the baby was born." And when she spoke again it was about something else. It would be foolish for me to try to arrange her sentences in any kind of order, and it would be impossible. Even if it were possible to take the words she uttered that night and arrange them in some kind of order, the thing would have no meaning. A thousand things could be made of the words and sentences, but there is no one who knows what the logical sequence should be. In the end, we could with just as much purpose shake several thousand words in a hat and put them together in the order in which they were drawn.

I am not trying to repeat the things she said. It would be impossible to do that. I did not even try to hear much of what was being said, and most of what I did hear was all but inaudible.

"The house they live in has two stories and an attic. The roof has been covered with tin painted red. In the yard are three elm trees."

I heard her say that, but put those sentences after "I was nineteen when the baby was born," and almost everyone would suppose that she had given birth to a child in a house with two stories and a tin roof painted red. And in the yard were elm trees. But that is not true, because the baby was born in a hospital. That's why I am not going to repeat what she said, at least not much of it. Some would be inclined to believe one thing, and some another. But the fact is that nothing

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someone else would be inclined to believe is true. What actually happened was that she said several things to me and stood beside me at the rail. That's why I don't know how the thing came about.

She had told me everything there was to tell. That was all she wanted to talk about. The baby had been taken away from her, and her husband had left her. "I have never been dishonest with him," she had said. "But he was tired of me, and he wanted to live with someone else. That was all right, if he wanted to do that. I loved him, but if he wanted to go, I did not want to make him stay. I really wanted him to go and be happy. But they had no right to take the baby. She was mine. I am her mother."

I am not going to tell a lie about this thing. A lie is told with words, and the words in this have nothing whatever to do with what I am telling.

The proper thing for me to have done was to offer to help her in some way, and to promise her that I would try to raise some money for a lawyer to take the matter to court. Or this and that. But I made no offer. I merely stood and looked at her, and waited to see what was going to happen next.

"The baby is mine," she said. "She is mine! I am her mother, and I have not been dishonest with him."

People were strolling past us, laughing and talking. There were three hundred people behind us.

"I'll never see my baby again. She will never see me. They will teach her that someone else is her mother. But she is my baby, and I'm her mother."

There is no reason why I should pretend not to be sentient about this. I have heard women many times before talk about their children, about their lovers, about nearly everything under the sun that women live for. It's nothing new to me. And yet, in a case such as this, when a woman comes up to me and says, "He begged me to marry him so we could live together and have a baby," I never know what to say or what to think. Usually I stand and look at her and wonder how such things happen. That was what she had said: "He begged me to marry him."

"This other woman he fell in love with knew some things I had never heard of. She made him happier than I could, and he wouldn't tell me what they were. If I had known, I would have given him everything she did. I could never find out what they were."

We were not at the rail then. We were in her cabin eating some sandwiches she had brought with her, and drinking ginger ale. Oh, the whole thing was mixed up. Nothing took place in logical order, and

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nothing had been said one moment that had any bearing on what was said the moment before. The whole thing was a hopeless cut-out puzzle with an unknown number of parts missing. It would never come out in a way that made sense. I knew that. I knew that even when the whole thing was over, when the puzzle was finished except for the missing pieces, that it would be unrecognizable. Neither I nor anyone else would know how the whole should appear.

She was on her way back home. At any rate, it had been her destination. But when she got there, there was nothing she could have done. She had no money for rent and food and clothes. She did not know where she could get a job. When she reached home, she would have been forced to walk from house to house asking for something to eat and for some work to do. If she had had her baby, she could have undertaken to do that. But alone, with no family to help her, and with nothing left to live for, it would have been more than she could have stood. There is a breaking point. There's a place which is the end. After that, going back is the only way left. She could not go back. They had shut the door in her face, and had told her not to come there again.

"I don't care what happens to me tonight," she said. "Nothing matters now. I want to forget everything for a few moments. If I could only be happy for a little while, I would be satisfied. I have never talked like this before, because this is the first time I have ever thought of such things. I have always been honest with my husband. I did not deceive him. I have never been unfaithful. I have not even wanted to be. I have never done anything that I knew he did not want me to do. Now I don't care what happens. I only want to be happy for a few short minutes. Perhaps I could get some liquor and drink until I am senseless. But that's foolish. I couldn't be happy that way. I would only be asleep. I want to feel happy, and know that I am."

I'm not going to lie about this thing. I could make the whole thing a lie, perhaps, pretending that I tried this way and that to comfort her. Perhaps I might have told her that if she stopped thinking about it so much and went to sleep that everything would be all right the next day. But I said nothing like that. I did nothing of the kind. I did not try to stop her from talking like that. When she began to cry, I put the empty ginger ale bottles on the floor, in the corner so the roll of the ship wouldn't upset them, and looked at her while she tried to talk at the same time.

"This woman he loved drank a certain kind of liquor with him and then they lay down together. I would have been glad to do that for

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him, but it would not have been necessary to make him happy. My love was stronger than anything like that can be. I would have torn myself open for him."

When she first began talking like that, I didn't know what to do. She had given up all hope of ever seeing either her husband or her baby again, and she knew that what happened after that night would not concern her. And she knew there was a way to forget and feel happy, even if it was so short. She must have known that when she began telling me that she wanted to forget for a few moments.

"He used to come home, after being away two or three weeks, and tell me to leave him alone. He never knew how much he hurt me, but I could stand it then because I had my baby. But there were times when I wanted him so much. No one will ever know how I loved him. I loved him and my baby more than my life."

What in God's name could I have said? What could a man, accustomed to doing the things he wanted to do, say to a woman who had told him that? How could I understand what she was talking about? How can a man, running here and there as fancy strikes him, know how a woman feels when she is forced to live mute and alone?

Oh the whole thing was a jumble. It was the framework of an image, indistinct and unbelievable. When she asked me what time it was, she knew and I knew that time did not matter. Time had nothing to do with who we were, what we were doing, and what we were talking about. The face of a clock is merely a reminder of the past. One o'clock, ten o'clock or five, it would still have been time for her to go in and see if the baby had tossed the cover off and to tuck her in for the night.

But why did my hands tremble, and why did my heart quiver? This thing was real. There she was, sitting before me, crying this moment and laughing the next. She had a ring on her finger. The wood-work creaked under the stress and strain of the sea and the engines. It was real. I could feel it with my hands. I could touch it, scratch it, mar it with the nails in my heels.

"I went down to the dock and bought a ticket. I had to wait nearly half an hour because there was such a crowd ahead of me. It took a long time for me to get aboard."

How did all this happen? How did it come about that I, who had never seen her before and who would never see her again, went with her and sat down in front of her? There were other things to do. This was not the only cabin on the ship. She was not the only person. It

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would be so easy to tell what might have happened, rather than tell what actually did. It would be easier than doing this.

"Hurt me—ruin me—kill me!" she whispered. "Look! You won't have to suffer!"

A thousand lies could be told about the whole thing. I could say I said this-and-that; I could say I did this-that-and-the-other. A thousand things might have happened, but only one did. This only happened. This one thing. That's why I do not know how it came about. That's why I can't repeat, in logical sequence, what was said. Everything was in a hopeless jumble. This second she said one thing, and the next second something else. Putting the two together made no sense.

I put my hand over her mouth. She had begun to scream. Screams such as I had never before heard pounded against my ears. The scratching at my face and shoulders I could partly endure and partly evade, but the screams had to be stopped. I tied a heavy bath towel over her mouth. What else could I have done? She lay there and scratched me and held me and tried to scream until her face was as discolored as a bruise. She wanted to scream. It mattered nothing to her that there were three hundred people on the boat. If three hundred people heard her, or if no one heard her, she did not care. If the door was battered down, showing us there, she did not care. But I tied a heavy bath towel over her mouth. She tried to jerk it off, but I held it there. If she had torn it away and screamed, I could have forced it into her throat and choked her. She would have stopped breathing then. She wanted me to kill her. She had said so. She had begged me to kill her. But first she wanted to be happy. She wanted to feel the happiness within her body. She wanted to forget herself in happiness. There was a way.

All that was before. Everything seemed to be before anything else. Everything had happened before anything else had. That was why it was such a hopeless jumble. Time, place, and events had neither a beginning nor an end. I actually do not know what the sequence of events was. I am just trying to tell about them. There is no possible way of placing them in the order of their origin. That's why the thing can't be told with any order. That's why I can't lie about what happened. They will have to be put down just as they are. The things she said will have to be put down as she said them. If she had spoken with order, things would perhaps be clear. And if nothing comes out right in the end, it will be because I tried to put the whole thing down with respect for her. She had said things and done things with no regard for the way they would look and sound when re-acted and repeated. She didn't

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care about that. She wanted to be happy, to feel happiness within her self, for a few moments.

She had said: "He wanted me to marry him. He begged me to do it. He cried when I said I wanted to wait a while longer. He cried like a baby. A great big strong man like him cried like a baby."

She had said: "We lived in a six-room house with a pump on the back porch. We had a collie puppy named Spot. Oh, we were so happy together, all the time, day and night. Don't look at me when I cry; I can't help it."

I don't know what I said. That is the truth. But what in God's name could I have said? She did not want me to talk to her. Only to listen now.

"Oh, I loved him so! And we loved each other like nothing else in the world for nearly two years. Then one night he came home and said he was going to leave me. He told me about the other woman. He told me what she looked like and how she wore her clothes. He told me what she looked like when they slept together. Oh, he told me everything about her. He told me of many things I had never heard of before. He said she knew all about those things. Then he went away and left me. Someone came and took the baby away. They jerked her out of my arms and ran out of the house and out of sight before I could stop them. I did not know how to stop them. I did not know what to do. Then I went up there, where his home was. His sisters and mother had my baby, holding her in their arms. They would not even let me touch her, or kiss her. When I tried to reach for her, they pushed me back and shut the door. They left me standing there on the porch, shutting the door and locking it to keep me out."

And then about the first week of their marriage. But what was it she said? Something about how they loved each other. The way he had of waking her up in the morning. And something else. What was that? But he loved her then, as much as she loved him.

Oh there were a hundred things she had said. I remember everything, but I can't recall the words she used. I can't repeat them. She uttered them in a jumble of things. They had come from her lips like the jumble parts of a cut-out puzzle. There is no man wise enough or patient enough to put the words in their correct order. If I attempted to put them together, there would be too many 'ands' and 'buts' and 'theys' and thousands of other words left over. They would make no sense in human ears. They were messages from her heart. Only feeling is intelligible there. Sounds that 'ands' and 'buts' and 'theys' make never

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reach that deep. Only feeling reaches those depths. The words from her lips were never intended to be reassembled in the first place. Let them go. Let them resound their poor meanings upon trivial ears.

All that was before. It was before anything had happened. Nothing had yet taken place. All that was to be, was yet to come. There had been words, movements, and glances; but nothing at all had happened. You feel such things. Sounds cannot talk like that. Sounds in ears have only the sensation of loudness and softness. All that is unimportant. It is trivial. What I love and hate is the feeling of things. I felt her. I am not lying about it. I did feel her. And I am trying to tell of what I felt. It was the quiver of her heart against my heart.

All that was before those quick movements when she looked at me once more, and left. It was the last of them all. There was nothing more to come afterward. Everything else had been before, and now it had happened.

The rail was before us. Her hands were resting on it, then gripping it tightly, so tightly that the tips of her fingers became white. A tightening of her fingers over the varnished rail was beginning of it all. Nothing had happened until then.

The shore lights were a long way off. They were further away than ever. There was no background of land, only the dim lights hanging over the foreshore like fire-flies caught and pinned to the bare limbs of weather-whipped trees.

She did not say she was going. We knew that. She did not pause to remind me of herself. She did not expect me to think of her as one who was going. That's all it was. She had been standing beside me this moment, the next she was gone. It was a movement of unhurried simplicity. She leaned over the rail, far over, balancing herself before my eyes. Then with no effort, only the weight of her unbalancing body to carry her, she went over out of sight.

I could have stopped her. Of course I could have stopped her. Lies could be told about that, too. But I can't lie about it. I did not try to stop her. My hands did not move. But who would have wanted to stop her? Is there anyone who would have done that? Only a coward would have held her back. I'm certain of that. And I know. I was there. That's why I'm so sure about it. Only a coward would have grasped her, held her, and called for help. But we do not want to be cowards. We try our hardest to keep from it. All of us want to be brave, and we try our best to be above cowardice. We believe we are brave, and we attempt to act the part.

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I was brave. I let her go. I stood with my arms within reach of her, watching her go. I even had to move my left arm out of the way so she could go. If I had not moved it out of the way, she would have had to exert herself to get past me. So I stood there, brave, watching her go. When she had gone, I began to count. One-two-three-four-five-six-seven——.

What was that she had said about her husband? Something about his hair. Its color. Blond. His hair was blond. She had told me that. But what was the color of her hair? What was it? Blond? No. Brown? No. Red? No. Black? No. Then what was it! I don't know. I can't remember. I have forgotten. It was her color. That was all it should be. That is enough.

I was counting.——Forty seven——forty eight——forty nine——FIFTY! That's enough. She has gone. GONE!

What were all those things I could have done? The things I might have done? There were so many I can't recall most of them now. But it doesn't matter. Jump after her! No. Call for help! No. What then? Nothing. I did not want to become a coward. I was not afraid to see a woman die. If she was not afraid to die, why should I be afraid to witness the death? Only the brave can take themselves into death. Life is too precious for the most miserable of us—when we are cowards. Only the brave can walk to death without a blindfold. The cowards fight for the last breath, for the last glimpse, for the final touch. Cowards do not want to die. But she was not afraid. Then why should I be afraid to witness it? Am I a coward beside a brave woman! She did not expect me to be a coward. I could not deceive her.

Oh I might have done many things. I could have first of all stopped her from going. Then what? Notify the Captain? Report it to the police at the dock? Make an effort to reach her husband through the newspapers? Why? Why should I have done anything? The death of a brave woman could not make me a coward.

The time to act was when she had leaned over the rail. Before she went over. But I didn't. I wanted her to feel her happiness in the act. We are only happy when we can do the thing we want to above all others. I was afraid to be a coward in the presence of a brave woman, a woman who was not afraid to be happy for a few moments.

That was all. And now this doesn't make much sense. The words are a jumble. The sounds they make are sometimes loud, sometimes soft. None of them is of any importance. Only feeling matters. It is of that

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which has been told. I have been telling of feeling, the quiver of her heart against my heart.



ELECTRA-ORESTES

Choros Sequence.

H. D.

1.

Electra: To love, one must slay,
how could I stay?
to love, one must be slain,
then, how could I remain,
waiting, watching in the cold,
while the rain
fell,
and I thought of rhododendron
fold on fold
the rose and purple and dark-rose
of her garments;

her clothes
were purple
her way,
toward an open temple,
mine toward a closed
portico;
the sea beat high
and the Aegean rose,
the wave and the sea-wave and the salt-wave
of the Aegean rose
to beat down the portal;
no one knows
what I myself did not,
how the soul grows
how it wakes

and breaks
walls,
how, within the closed walled stone,
it throws
rays and buds and leaf-rays
and knows
it will die
if the stones lie much longer
across the lintel and between the shafts
of the epistyle;

no one knows
what I myself did not know,
that the soul grows in the dark
and outside one waits in the rain,
seeing her change from purple to dark-rose again,
seeing her choose
the reds and the sea-blues,
knowing the sting of her rose-of-Eos
scent in my brain,
hating and longing and still;

O God
if only someone would tell the child
how it loves—
but time goes,
no one knows
until it is too late
and the high-dead lie in state,
the heart—
the heart—
the heart—
how it thrives on hate.

2.

He marked the pattern of the sky,
but I
saw not the passing of the Wain,
saw not the Plough,
saw no bright Dragon

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nor the Water-snake
saw not the great nor small Dog
nor the Bees,
saw not Orion nor the Pleiades,
saw not the glittering row
of that one's belt,
saw not star-angle or star-tilt
of that sword-hilt;

He traced the Archer
on one summer night,
light from the terrace,
faded out star-flight
of doves;
we moved
out toward the lion-portal
through the grove
of myrtle;
one cypress
made a column
like black smoke from incense;
Agememnon spoke:
the Sickle shines in winter
and the Maiden with the wheat-spike head
rules in the dead
heat of the summer;
a stream ran small and terrible and shrill;
it was so still;

the stream ran from the oak-copse
and returned and ran
back into shadow.

3.

Choros: *Lovers may come and go,*
there was the memory of blood,
the low call;
tread not in blood
on marble,
who would know

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later fulfillment:

*there was one cry
defilement;
one dull blow;
let no one say
the lustral vases will wash clean,
demean not your fair mind
with lies.*



FROM THUNDER TO THUNDER

David Cornel DeJong

The afternoon was very still, till cockcrows trembled and the wheat waved. The sky was with us and moved along with the far away places tagging the horizon. We walked in the dust. We walked into the sky on a high road which had no ending save in the clouds from which it thundered. There was dust on her ankles, and because there was little to say, we swayed our hands and hummed tunes; but around us frogs grew silent, and then we grew silent too and thought of each other. The sun was so tall and so far away that the shadows at our feet dropped narrowly around the ankles. A crow cawed. The thunder was a very tired outward rumble, which left everything slow and inconsequential. Once a dog passed us, and twice a car, leaving the dust salty on our lips. I whistled when the cars passed, because the noise splintered into our ears and drowned all that wide, lazy day. One driver, wind-red, yelled, "Treat her easy, Bud." Still, I was not so young, and hating his lunging, dusty body, I smiled nevertheless and dropped her arm. Later, by the aspen I took it again. She shook her shoulders as if she were shaking something desperate away. But there were also raspberries, and we ate them among the first of the black eyed susans, pecking them away from each other's lips like birds. I discovered then that I was young and that her eyes were older than mine. I had known her twenty days, but she was older because her voice knew how to attune itself to this situation, where mine was strident, as of first robins coming too soon in April. So slow the wind came between us and over us, that we shivered and rose, while from the lowland came voices to horses, and received no answer. And

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broadly pale the whole land stretched away from us as we walked on, greying our ankles.

By the waterhole, with all the sun and the gloss green leaves beneath which the frogs got warily silent, was a haystack. To it we walked, pretending we had no destination. Birds tumbled up and flew down so shrilly, that we heard nothing else. And the path was so narrow, that she walked behind me, and I heard all the movements of her clothes and her feet and toes and her breath. Then after a horse's keen neighing we hummed again and stood before the stack, on the side where the sun was not, and faced each other.

We went on the hay. She stepped in the hollows of my hands, and when I looked up and saw the whiteness of her thighs, I heard the birds very loudly, and I tried to wish that I could run away to a far away place about which I knew nothing. On top of the stack we sat apart, and the first loud thunder rolled around us, and all the birds shattered away with rocking voices, up and then over a curve in the hillside. We grew very silent, until she told me that at St. Joseph the swell of waves along the dunes grew so heavy that at night she shivered through the smell of the spruces. Then we looked at each other, and lay on our bellies next to each other, like two, sun-lazy animals. When I stroked my hands over the rise of her shoulders, she lay dead still, and when my hot hand molded the nape of her neck, she said, "Look," and pointed downward to the pool, where a sleek rat swam away followed by dark silver eddies of water. His eyes were black like bits of polished stones, and the water rocked against strong blades and flat leaves and then was done with rocking. The rat was gone among glossy leaves and water spiders ran nervously over the water.

We put our heads together and kissed, and then we sat up and looked at the movement of the clouds, which moved like boulders, and we almost heard the sound of boulders. Then we looked at each other again, and slid down the haystack together and walked away along the dusty road again, with the white clover cloying and the frogs loud when we were far enough away.

I met her on the street. The summer had lapsed to the first falling of leaves and the sun seemed to grow tired of rising so high. The music from open-doored houses was no longer poignant, and old men's eyes dulled again toward another winter. So we met, with the yellow sun brown on her hair and the wind around her throat. I knew a little more then. On the old bench behind the freight-house I had learned many

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phrases, and an awareness to cope with awkward or necessary situations. So I came to her, when I was far off, but when I saw her face to face, I laughed with her, and repeated old vaudeville jokes with more laughter. People on the street did not seem to notice us much, and only thin, rocking women on uncertain porches stiffened their shoulders a little and craned their necks too politely. We walked arm in arm, but I uneasily, and again she was much older than I.

She lived up one flight of sour, dry stairs. There was not much in her room; an old rocker, a chair with clothes on it, and a bed. The sun had left a dusty, cement dry reek in the room. I sat in the rocker and rocked creakingly, and she lay on the bed, her feet on the pillow. She cupped her chin in her hands and looked at me through the green painted bars. I got silent looking at an old browned picture of a girl with two white dogs. The rocker creaked and creaked. She said, "Nice fellows like you, I don't mind, nice clean fellows," and chuckled at me through the green bars.

Then I lit a cigarette and went to the window. It was open, and I leaned out and saw the men from the warehouse below us. She came next to me and leaned out of the window also. We dropped matches down on the men. Then I said, "Shall I spit down?" But she shook her head and took my cigarette out of my mouth, puffed at it once, and dropped it on the men. Two men looked up and yelled at us, and we slammed the window down, and laughed and ran to the bed, holding on to each other. She said, "They'll be coming up."

We lay on the bed and waited, but no footsteps came. We remained on the bed and touched each other. She said again, "Nice boys like you, I'm not scared of." We stayed together a long time, and the room grew a little dark and very hot, because the window was shut. But everything was all different, and did not seem at all new. Only the trucks leaving the warehouse shook the walls and the drivers swore. It all seemed very old and very new, and without cause or consequence. The light ebbed out of the room. There was nothing left to say, and later I rose and lit another cigarette and left. I ran a little on the stairs, and the wind outside brushed me on all sides, and the light blurred everything a little. Above me, she opened the window again.

Spring came again soon after the last snow on northern slopes. People sat on new green benches, but held their hands in their pockets. Robins were so vigorously loud that they annoyed after the first three days, and the grass sprouted rapidly with tall, lush blades. It was good to be back.

PAGANY

It was good to shoulder through all the cold, wild air again. Old women stooped everywhere over baby buggies and cooed at wet-nosed babies, and dogs stopped to sniff at anything. An old horse fell down in the street, and a big blonde woman kicked the driver when he hit the horse's side with a stick. When I walked back to the park again, I saw her.

I saw her on a park bench against the mock-orange. The fat man with her laughed from loose, red jaws, and had his arm around the back of the bench. When I walked in front of her, she drew her legs back and looked up and said, "Oh, you," and laughed. She stood up and said to the man, "Excuse me." The chain on his stomach dangled and his lips and chin got straight and oldish brown. She said again, "Excuse me," and we walked away together.

We laughed about the man and kept pace together. The squirrels were swift around the oaks and the spireas showed small white. She said she was glad to see me, and I told her about my work and kidded her. We went to her room, which was not in the same street. There were three chairs now, and tan, crumpled curtains bulging away from the windows. But all the strangeness was gone, and we ate apples, gone stale and tasteless, from a flat dish.

Much later we rose in the darkness and turned on the light. The bulb swayed and shadows of the rockers lapped over the floor and against the wall. The wind was chilly now and rippled the curtains. We went downstairs and had supper at a restaurant. The radio boomed, "Body and Soul" through heavy food smells. We liked each other and talked and ate long, till the waiter pushed the check in front of us. She said to him, "Say, big fellow," and he laughed back and winked one eye. Wrinkles spread all over his temples. We got up and went outside. The radio crooned, "If I could be with you for just one hour," then the door slammed shut and a streetcar passed. We said good-bye on the corner. I was tired and happy and went to walk along the river. Everything was dead still and dark there.

We had walked to the end of the flat pier where the motorboats were moored. There we sat down together. It thundered from a flat grey sky, and perches swam belly side up and bleary eyed in oily water. An odor of tar hung around the rushes, and people in faded bathing suits made faraway muffled noises. We took our shoes off and let our pale feet dangle in the warm water. Sometimes glossy black fishes came up when we held our toes very still, and swam away again with hardly a movement of fins. A garpike slid along like a dry, battered stick and went behind a sunken, rusted pail. We sat still and talked a little.

PAGANY

She said, "You don't like me much more." Then a grey gull curved down and lifted something glimmering from the water, came back again and shrieked. We watched the gull. Then she continued, "They all get that way, but you, you still like me a little." I nodded. Behind us two boys were fishing from the edge of the pier. When they scratched for worms in the rusty tin can, we could hear the scraping of their fingernails against the sides of the can.

It thundered again over the water, shakingly, as if heavy hoofs trampled over clumps of hard clay. More gulls came. One boy said, "You couldn't tell a sunfish from a hamstring." They quarreled over that in high voices, like distant voices of several gulls over water. I dipped her foot under the water with my own, and slid my wet toes over her shins. "It always seems to thunder when we are out together, don't it," she said. The waves came in with slow, flat motions and the grey sky darkened them.

"You were a nice boy, though," she said. The boy pulled up a small, thumblong fish and shouted. We pulled on our stockings and laced our shoes. I said, "You were good." Then it thundered again. Through the thick, moist sand we walked to the carline, humming together.



THREE POEMS

Edward Dahlberg

*To F S Flint: your gentle, peasant face
seems to have come out of one of those
clayey cliffs ruggedly featured and
planed by mists . . .*

AN AMERICAN'S LONDON

It is evening, some evening,
I don't remember which, there
have been seven week of London
evenings, rolling after one
another, like spools of crepe.
Black and penurious as an empty
coal-scuttle—I can't get through them.

PAGANY

I walk along, somnambulistically,
through Old Compton Street, and stare
after a streethustler who is just
about to swing into the *White Horse*.
She gives me the high sign. But she
doesn't mean anything to me; and
besides, I haven't even got the kale
to drink a glass of bitter with her.

She looks to have seen about forty
three winters, an Elsie Janis, in her
day, I bet, one of those ante-bellum
cuties. But she's all played out now.
The hem of her clothskirt mouses her
high top boots. It's frowsy and has
that war-exhaustion drag about the
pull and the body of it that you get out
of some of our contemporaneous buddies,
who still go on poetizing about Flanders
Fields of Poppies.

She's washed out all right.
But I'm not getting superior, old dear,
I'm no good either.
If I had had a hapenny's
worth of humor about me and a couple of
God Save the King's shillings in my
watchless pocket, I'd 'a joshed you,
and although your eyes have the dead, glaucous
luster of one of those oilswamps, below the elevated
trains as they come into Coney Island, I'd
tell you they were chirpier than the posies
I saw in an expensive florist's on Piccadilly.

But I'll be getting along now.
You belong to the Old War,
to the dirty, lousy Christs
in the cathedrals,
as D H Lawrence would say. We've passed
you. You were our *Annie Christie* days.

PAGANY

Our wops don't play the hurdy-gurdy any more. They sell fruit instead or sacramental bootleg dago-red. They're in politics.

And our pubs, we used to call them saloons, where you put your foot on the brass rail, they're done with too or turned into soft-drink counters. We've expressed ahead of all that. Those belong to our daguerreotypes. They were our Floradora Sextette tune. For all those days, it's twenty-three, skidoo for you, kid. Yes, we're older than you, Old World. We've racketed beyond you—and now you're trying to rag up your tempo to keep pace with us. Anyway, so long, no use moping around Old Compton Street any longer.

ST. LUKE'S CHURCH

It is an afternoon, some afternoon, for the life of me, I don't know which, I'm standing around South Kensington Station, waiting for the drizzle, one of those mean, avaricious rains that counts its drops like a French shopkeeper numbers the grapes to a kilo.

Opposite me, is the queue, of taxis, as you call it. The sun is defunct. The London streets are Pittsburgh mines. The day looks down and out and needs a general overhauling.

Inside a fruitstore are geometric

PAGANY

rows of cape plums, fresh,
rain-fresh, and yet,
undertakered,
glass-coffined, and dolled up
like the high-colored cheeks
of an embalmed corpse.
In January all the posies, laburnums, lilies
of the valleys, all the sunbuds,
are lying in state behind plateglass windows.
Splendidly enough! Like a coronation.
Or Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance*.

And my heart, too, is almost
lying in state, and if it still
moves, it treads along in a
slow four-four march time,
the kind of time the wop bands
play when they are carrying in a swell limousine hearse
their macaroni buddy in arms, to Calvary Cemetery
out in Queens, Long Island.

And my heart is with the dead dagos
who lie underneath the muddy-vacant
lot they call Calvary—Calvary,
where all the wops and micks are
carried in great, expensive state,
like a director of an Akron rubber
company, and the wreaths over the
graves have gotten dried up and
sour-looking, as though
they were artificial
and had been faked-up,
like Brooklyn house-gables or
a Hollywood movie-set.

And now as I pass by St. Luke's,
where the slabs sooted by rains
stand shoulder to shoulder, I
move at the same nigger processional
rhythm, a wail in the creaking
of my holey half-soled shoes.

It's all a fake, unreal, the grounds
about, the pavement outside the fence,
like a vaudeville sidewalk
on a drop-curtain. All worked up
to get over a melodramatic effect.
Only St. Luke's, her grey-mist
stone, dying, only her low-pulsed
stone, ashen as a sick man's face,
slowly, surely going out, as my
own is inside me.

And then, as
I move up toward Sydney Street,
I see a bus heading down toward
the bottom, guttering out like
an old colonial oillamp.

MAUSOLEUM LONDON

When it rains
the Thames flows
meditative grey,
if a spilling, sloven rain
could only wash my poverty—
my ungracious poverty away.
The Carlton Band is jazzing
up Rio Rita—
O London don't slam the
door in my face—
My lips and socks are
garbaged jonquils—
O foreign Anglican Thames
be to my Franciscan poverty
ritual waters,
healing,
the Bhagavad-Gita,
be not ungentle
to my ungracious paucity.

When it rains

PAGANY

the swinging drizzle
drives the trade away.
The Thames mist is
a themal melody
over mausoleum London.
When the sun comes out,
the fog from the
crypt-streets
guillotines her.
The december sun
over Hyde Park
is a deracinated poppy.
Poppies have not such
poor use in California.

I went to Berkeley
when the poppies were there,
unexpatriated poppies,
acacia and goldenbroom.
and Eunice's seay hair,
laving the loneliness
of me . . .
I was not so tired then.
Tell me, is the Campanile
still there, and has the
new football stadium
ruined Strawberry Canyon?



NO GROUNDHOG'S LIFE

Moe Bragin

"Follow the master, big boy."

Chester backed away.

The linesman grinned. Spurred like a cock, he flew up the pole.
The pole shook.

Chester stuck his hands over his eyes as tho he were saluting. He
winced. He was in one of those moods when only looking at any one

PAGANY

climbing a moderate height made him imagine himself aloft, holding on for dear life, twisting with head down like a woodpecker, flying head-long, hands helplessly beating air.

He dragged his bike over to the market. Meat was coming in—hogs dressed in a sort of flimsy stuff like girl's underthings.

A titter . . . hands clapped on his eyes . . . He turned to find himself clutching Lilly Geed. Nearby her stocky kanuk cousin, Philip, scowling, the slash in his cheek as tho some other dog had taken a chunk out of it.

"You promised to come see me when school was over. Yes, you did before I went to Kebec for the summer up to last week."

He mimicked her. "I promised it bot I wooz workin'."

As she pouted and made eyes, something gripped his bowels as in a dream of falling. "Why ain't you workin' now, lazy bugs?"

"Oh, quit," he said lamely. "They want me to get ready for college this fall."

Philip cocked his thumb at the bike handlebars on which hung an old hunting cap resembling an aviator's helmet. "Maybe he's got a flyer's job."

Lilly laughed. "Now don't tell the beeg policeman on the corner. The tobacco leafs is crackin'. Want a job choppin' tomorrow? Come over to see me. You'll get a nice job, lazy bugs."

She skipped into the car. Philip backfired and sped thru the smoke like a flicker.

Chester felt the blood washing his face. He kept blinking thru smarting eyes. On the other side of the street in Rosenkranz's store window a picture of curly-headed Lindbergh with a wreath like a Roman hero had been hanging for weeks. He went across.

The old German grunted, "I chucked it away. You still like this flying business? So . . . I hear the boys talking. They say you're scared like a chicken. That Philip Geed, he says you can't hang washing from your ma's first floor window . . ."

Chester's fists trembled. "He'd better keep his peeper shut. Whatever I'm scared of 'll peel off soon enough for him."

He slammed out of the store. He pushed his bike up to the house where he flung it against the elm on the lawn. The cotton wadding to catch caterpillars was black and torn: it looked like two mourning bands. He rushed to his room and fell down heavily in a chair before his desk. His fingers beat a tattoo as tho he were a wireless operator in a ship foundering at sea.

PAGANY

Downstairs on the porch his brother-in-law and sister were chatting. He crept down to them.

"I've got another job," he said in a weak voice.

"Where now?"

"Geed's farm."

Tillie sat up. "But what will ma say?"

"I don't give a damn. I'm tired of being puppied around."

"Chester!"

Tom stopped stroking his pinch of moustache. "Sh . . . sh . . . Tillie, neither you nor Mother ought to say anything any longer. The boy's big enough to scratch for himself now."

Chester muttered, "It's about time." He blundered into Tom's office and searched thru the medical dictionaries and encyclopedia. His mother kept bawling after him like a cow for a calf lost in a long wood. He made a face and heaved up to her dim room.

"Where've you been all day?"

"In hell."

She quailed . . . "You're becoming headstrong's your father. Can't you be nice to your sick mother a minute? Soon you'll be away to college and—"

"I'm not going."

"But everything's settled," she gasped. "You don't have to worry about the money. If you're so stubborn, I'll lend you my little."

"Keep it. I want no charity. I won't have the fellows in gym poke fun at me any more. I'm going to earn what I spend. I'm going to go to flying school . . ."

"Foolish child, when you can't go up those bars."

"I know it. Let me be scared for myself. But you're always sticking your two cents in. I'm going flying anyway. I'd rather be dead like poor dad than a groundhog all my days."

She sunk his head between her breasts. "Oh, Chester, Chester."

He patted her awkwardly as she quivered and sobbed. He whispered huskily, "I've got a job on Geed's farm. Chopping, I s'pose."

He picked her fingers off as tho she were catbrier. "I had three jobs this summer. You spoiled all for me. Cousin Hen in town wanted me to do aerial work for his radio firm. You called him up and made me give up the job. When I worked for Abner Horn and they were putting cowpeas in for ensilage, you smelled something bad about my trying to go up in the silo. You phoned him too. They sent me into the garden patch to pick off potato bugs and eggs. All the damn kids

PAGANY

poked fun at me, dared me go up and touch the hams on the low beam in the wagon house. I feel soft's a rotten mushroom inside. No more listening to any one, don't care who . . . "

She twisted her plump body; the tears slipped down her face. She placed her hands in a cross on her breasts and faced the picture in the dark corner with resignation. As she dozed off, she munched as tho sleep were one of the apples she never sickened of.

He hurried back to his room. For a long time he stood before the wall papered with pictures he had cut out of magazines, newspapers, books. Old-fashioned planes shaped like boxkites . . . brand new models with slim bodies, slim as pike or trout leaping for flies. A gallery of flyers—the curly-headed "lone eagle" and his wife in dozens of different places, a French flyer hooded like a hunting falcon, Byrd high above the mudball earth, humans below on their hindlegs like groundhogs watching him swooping by.

He undressed, his heart a fresh fist tightened to drive him ahead. But the old sleeplessness bothered him. He tossed from side to side, caught himself falling from great heights. He tried reading some Dumas and Scott until his head felt as in a tight steel helmet. The image, unusually vivid, of his father stuck on the mowing machine after that sudden slip reddened every page.

He flung the books away. He drew a "mystic photo" of Lindbergh out of a desk cubbyhole. An ad, issued by a town barber, it showed on one side Lindy's face in black and white. When you looked at the dots of the nose for a minute without blinking, then stared at the sky, a wall, a piece of furniture, the photo appeared greatly enlarged. Chester leaned back. The image of the broken body disappeared; the mystic photo of the fearless flyer pulsed at his will on his hands, the walls, the ceiling. It finally soothed him to sleep.

He was up late and rushed down for breakfast.

"Ches," said Tillie, "you look like you're going to a dance and not to dirty tobacco work."

Tom laughed. "Duked out . . . I'll be hornswoggled if he ain't got a part in his hair at last. Looks like a singed hog there. That rich Geed girl's pretty as a picture, and no muzzle on her too. When her mother was confined last winter, she said to me when she's married she'll have yours truly as her midwife doctor a dozen times."

Chester grabbed his lunch.

"How about going to see your ma before you go?"

Tom looked reproachfully at Tillie.

PAGANY

Wearily Chester climbed the stairs. She was eating baked apples. She pulled him down to her, calling him teaselhead.

"Please don't paw me."

Her eyes filled. "Now don't be rash. It's only chopping, remember."

He suffered her to kiss him. In a jiffy he was on his bike tearing down the road. He played he was making a V in the muggy air like one of big Canada geese on the Geed horsepond under the willows.

On the porch of the farmhouse sat the chubby little Mrs. Geed suckling the baby. She smiled and put a big handkerchief like a napkin over her breasts. Lilly ran out of the kitchen breathlessly to say hello. Louie Geed shook hands cordially.

They went to the big shed where they sorted fertilizer bags, piled laths, raked the floor clean. Chester kept looking up at the crossplanks, the tiers on which tobacco was hung for curing.

"Am I going to chop?"

Louie grinned. "No, you hang. You're a beeg man and got arms long's beanpoles."

"But—but Lilly said you wanted me for chopping."

He led him to the high old cow barn. "We changed her to tobacco shed. You hang here."

A bunch of machinery waiting to be pushed under the lowest tier. Instead of planks rolly logs on which the hanger would stand.

Philip and his father were working in the peak. Philip rung tauntingly near the gallowsplate. He snapped his dog's mouth at him as at a fly.

Chester crept outside, frowning at his finger nails with the milk spots on them. They jabbered for him from the lowest tier soon. He looked wildly about. He ran up the tongue of the roller to grab a beam. He straddled it. The dusty floor started shuddering like a beast trying to rid its hide of something pesky. He squeezed among the three sweaty Kanuks and shoved, wobbled-kneed, with them. Clumsier than a June bug, he felt in their way. His cocked fear pecked at his eyes and ears until his face was full of blood.

The three jumped down. He sidled up to a joist, clung to the barn-side like a sparrow, and dropped. He moved stiffly into the muggy day to find Lilly flying up on his bike.

The uncle shot off his mouth in Kanuk.

Philip yapped in derision.

PAGANY

"Dirty, dirty peeg." Lilly stamped her foot. She drew Chester down the path.

"Please."

"What did he say about me?" he said hoarsely.

"Nothin', nothin'."

"Dirty mouth."

He clutched her by the arm. "I got to know."

"He says you're scared. You walk—you walk like you have a bad stomach."

He flung the bike to the ground.

Lilly dashed in front of him. "Lazy bugs, you fight, I don't like you at all."

She clung to him. In a while his eyes cleared: he reached for his lunch. She wouldn't let him budge. He must eat with the family.

After dinner they sat under the willows. Chester fondled his new briar pipe and chatted about his ambition. He showed the Geeds the "mystic photo." It didn't take Lilly long to get the trick of making Lindy loom like an immense cloud in the sky. She was so delighted that he presented it gallantly to her.

Louie looked at him with a peculiar grin. "You ain't got to be scared."

Chester flushed and worried his pipe.

When the older people were gone, Lilly sang Kanuk songs. Her favorite, "A la Claire Fontaine," she repeated for him.

Chester listened carefully to the story of the unhappy lover, the nightingale, the lovely fountain he had bathed in. "It's a good song because it's not about a groundhog thing. That fellow was aching for something . . . Bathing in a beautiful fountain's like going up in a plane, I s'pose . . ."

He rose and went to the shed to finish his work.

Mid-afternoon Lilly passed with a basket on her way to the orchard. He went along. He knelt for the windfalls.

"No, no, climb up."

She laughed and jumped. Up the astrakhan in a jiffy, she swung up a high bough, her dress like a bell, her legs together like the tongue of a ringing bell. He caught sight of her white silk underthings. He felt himself shaken up like a bean bag. Twittering in the crown of the tree, she pelted him with apples. He filled the basket.

She flew down.

"I—I should have gone up."

PAGANY

She wrinkled her nose. "You have a bad stomjack."

He turned to the fence, his knees heavy as millstones.

"I'm so awfully sorry," Lilly faced him, crying. "Please, please . . . maybe I can help, lazy bugs . . . tell me once, Ches, please . . ."

He stood deep in a patch of smartweed. Little by little he hammered it out.

Even from the top of the feed room the forty foot ladder barely reached the peak of the roof where they were fitting the rock chain for the new harpoon hayfork. Chester felt frisky as a pup because he had worked out the system of pulleys for filling the mows from a wagon on the barn floor. He whistled perched on a crossbeam, a pitchfork's reach from the cupola under which his father was working. Tom, on the farm for the week end, stood at the foot of the ladder to keep it from slipping. Another chain was needed. "Hold on, you old hayseeder." "O.K. laddy." Tom climbed down slowly and hustled to the tool shed. Mother hurried in. She started scolding father for something or other in her usual way. With a jerk ladder slipped. A body hung like a drop worm for a second. Then the fluttering as of a red butterfly spiked on cutting bar and levers of the mower on the floor. Up on the beam nailed down with horror, he, long after Jeff the hired man and Tom had carried his hysterical mother away. Ages later they did climb up for him who fell into strong arms weak as swallow drops.

The blood buzzed in Chester's head like a far-off propellor. "We lost the farm . . . moved all the way out here . . . two years ago . . ."

Lilly pulled the handkerchief out of her dress. She wiped his face. "Bend head, lazy bugs," she whispered.

She hung the sacred medal she always wore around his neck. "For keeps. Will you be scared?"

He squared his shoulders.

She kissed his hand. In a moment off with her basket, leaping in her flight like a goldfinch.

He stood rooted among the weeds. At last he picked an astrakhan she had dropped and put it into his pocket. He found his bike and arrowed down the road. Some kids at the end of the farm near the marshes whistled to him like hylas; high in a white oak Lilly's young brother, Jean, waving. He waved joyously back, and sped home.

They didn't hear him from the back porch.

"Now that ma's back in a village where she can go to church affairs and card games and all she's hankered after, she's helpless as a hopped hen."

"Feels herself responsible for what happened," Tom said. She was never cut out to be a farm wife, but a lady of the land."

Tillie sighed, "Oh God, if we had only stayed in town."

"She nagged your dad so . . . Those two jobs teaching science almost ruined his health . . . but he sure took to farming like a duck to water . . . Where in Sam Hill's that kid? Fine for a short spell, then worrying again till he looks like some sort of horse gall."

Chester broke from his crouch. The old misery once more. He ran toward the curb as tho he were going to butt his head against a tree. Mile after mile he pumped on his bike down the road. He returned in the dark feeling like a spit out skin.

Tillie was at the supper table. "Where've you been? Mother's worse tonight. We found her crying her heart out again under dad's picture. She—."

"She gives me a pain. Wants to keep me in this hole all my life. God damn it to hell, she won't!"

Tillie stared at him in amazement.

He tramped upstairs. Tom was squeezing a tube of yellow stuff on her eyelids, bits like potato bug eggs. He hurried to the bathroom. Tom caught up with him.

"Chester, she's scared stiff about you. Go in. Remember she's sick. If she nags, don't give her Hail Columbia."

He washed first. He took his time before he turned into her room.

"I don't want you to go to that farm," she breathed.

He set his teeth fiercely. "I'm going anyway."

Her face puffed. "But why, why?"

"Don't you understand? There's where it all happened. On a farm. It's like Lindy's case. He and his wife were hurt in their plane. What did they do when they landed? They got first aid immediately and went up right after in the same plane. They knocked their scaredness out for a goal. It's an army law. It's good. It was in one of the med magazines too. Ask Tom."

"That Lindy'll break his fool neck one of these days."

"So long as he's no groundhog." He slammed the door behind him.

In his room he paced the floor, remembered the uncle's filthy remark, Philip's scowl, Lilly's eyes laughing, and the beauty of a flyer flying up as in a fountain of air. He stopped before the picture of the "lone eagle." His head seemed to be in a tight hot helmet. He went around the room like a circus horse, the body of his fear jumping him.

Tom poked his head in late. "Want a pill to make you sleep?"

Chester tightened his lips. The "mystic photo" would have helped. He choked suddenly, "Say, say if a fellow gets a shock. It changes him like he's wearing a different hide. Can't he turn back to what he was at first if he gets another shock? Can't a nice fall or something wake him up?"

He looked pleadingly at the fraternity pin with the skull and bones.

Tom grinned. "Sometimes it'll put him to sleep forever. What's biting you now?"

"Nothing, nothing . . . only the second shock often works against the first, kind of neutralizes it. It's happened to flyers and fighters. They forget themselves, have no guts at all. What's that forgetting called—nesia, manesia, magnesia?"

"Magnesia!" howled Tom. "You deserve a kiss for that. Imagine I'm Lilly."

Chester shoved him out into the hall. He shut the door.

The floor started creaking in the next room. He jumped into bed, shoes and all, and swiftly covered himself.

She smelled like an old cider apple as she bent over to kiss him. She smoothed his hair. She groaned and sighed. As she left the room, she reached for the astrakhan he had left in his silk handkerchief on the desk.

He hurled himself out of bed, glaring hatefully at the door. He stuck his head thru the window. The stars were thick in the sky. It would not rain tomorrow. He slumped on a chair. He must write a letter to Lilly, excusing himself for not showing up, pleading he was unwell. He would return the sacred medal. He would clean it first. In his sweaty pocket it had become slightly soiled. He drew out his chemistry set with the vials of mercury and acid. Christ looked sadly back at him, the great heart on the flowing robe with numerous rays as tho it had drawn darts and thorns from many to it. Chester whirled away disgusted with his easy thoughts of surrender. And in the meantime the hands of the clock were making a black circle like a compass in which he struggled unavailingly.

Towards dawn, he took his blankets, tiptoed downstairs, and lay on the porch bundled up like an old soldier on campaign.

In the morning, hollow-eyed, he would have no breakfast. A clean stomach for a clear head. As he hustled upstairs for his pipe, he met his mother.

"Are you really going to that farm?"

He started shouting, "God's sake, God's sake, I'm sick of talking."

PAGANY

Louie'll give me a steady job. He needs a good mechanic. Lilly says we can make a flying field of the big pasture . . . "

"That two by four, that chit!"

He gulped.

"She's trying her tricks she tried last spring. Those Frenchies marry while their mothers have to powder them yet. You are going to college this fall. That chit!"

He pounded the banister with his fist. "I don't like the way you say that word. I don't like it. Even if you're sick. You were always bawling dad out for using farm language. You use it yourself. You're the groundhog here. Now I know it all. If you'd thought about me on the beam, brought me down soon after, and made me go up again, I'd be with guts now. I've got other goods on you, too. Far worse . . . "

Her mouth fell open. Her face looked like a peach with the stone thumbd out.

He stumbled, shaken, to the porch. He ran to his bike.

The road was hot as he pedaled along, the wayside flowers and bushes dry of dew. He burst into the farmyard full of men, women, and kids. Lilly, blushing, jumped on the handlebars and rode with him to the field ahead of the other choppers.

The men bent to grab the plants with their left hands. They swung their tomahawk-shaped hatchets and chopped the stalk a few inches above ground. Chester worked nearest the stubble field. Lilly ran alongside in a tight middy blouse that looked as tho she had hidden two astrakhans there. She whipped him on; eager, he beat the surly Philip.

Under the hot sun it didn't take long for the chopped plants to wilt. The kids drove up with the racks. The women followed chattering. Louie gave the choppers the signal to stop. He looked at Chester and blew. "Holy, I had hell of a job keepin' up with you. You chop like lightnin'."

Chester looked at the milk spots on his fingers. "Took me time to get into the swing at first. I used to keep up with dad and Jeff. Before it—when I was fifteen, I beat both of them hanging."

"Wan' chop all the time?"

"It's a dirty groundhog job, but—."

Lilly cried, "Your ma calls up early. She says we don't dare ask you about hanging even."

Chester gulped, "She has no say. I'm my own boss."

"You're scared," butted in Philip. "Down in school the fellers say he's scared to jump the broomsticks up in the gym a baby could."

"Who's scared?"

"You're scared. You're no more a man than one of them horn-worms." He crooked a finger.

The tobacco field surged. A green wave broke from it and smashed over Chester. Cursing, he leaped for Philip.

They hustled between them.

Lilly flew to her aunt and chattered in Kanuk. The aunt, looking like a Canada goose, gabbled at Philip.

"It's true anyway," he muttered. He turned tail and stalked off.

"Anybody round here dare . . ." Chester tightened the lines on his quivering lips. He caught his breath. "I'll hang."

Louie clapped his paws. "Plain's daylight, no scare there."

The women and kids flocked into the field to pick the plants for Louie and Philip who stood near their string horses, ready to spear the big butts. Chester waved to Lilly and hurried to the old cow barn. He fished around in a box near the door for two measuring pieces to get the distance between the laths up on the tiers.

The hoot of a car . . . yelling . . . Tom making a beeline for him.

"The women think you're dead as a mackerel already. Mother wants you to quit, to go home like a nice little boy."

"Like hell I will."

"Call her up then. We've been having Glory Hallelujah with her."

"Honest Tom, she gets my goat, my damned goat till I'm sick of everything." He walked halfway down the footpath. "Straight from the shoulder. Didn't dad drink, get mad as hops often because she was always nagging, crabbing?"

Tom picked at the skull on his shirt.

"I heard you on the porch last night. It was no accident at all."

The phone buzzed in the farmhouse.

Tom said, "What's the use of picking on old sores. You're imagining too much."

Mrs. Geed was on the porch, pointing to Chester.

His eyes burned. "Poor dad, she made a groundhog out of you. I know it now." With a cry he dashed inside and flung himself against the phone. "I'm hanging," he yelled.

"Ches, Ches," groaned Tom, "what devil's poking you? She's your—."

"Mother or no mother, she's no right to poke her nose into my life. It's mine yet."

His great anger catapulted him toward the barn. He reared like

a big cat, sharpening claws on wood. He grabbed a brace as if to break it. He swung. His teeth ground so tight against each other that they ached. A high rafter made him hang like a rider on a wild horse. He groped for the last tier, his heart knocking violently like a loose engine.

When the blood had died out of his ears, he heard creaking far below.

"Lazy bugs, lazy bugs . . ." Lilly was swinging up as easily as she had climbed the astrakhan. "Scared?"

Face white . . . "No, no, like ducks . . ."

Her hair smelled like the bags hooding the tobacco flower to keep bees off.

"This ain't time for love makin', lady bugs." Philip had sneaked in behind her. "I speare an' you skidoo without no one to load for me."

"Why you follerin' me like a dog?"

"Tend to business."

She laughed teasingly as she let herself down.

Chester made a movement to follow. He must poke that fellow in the eye, once and for all. Fear drummed his breath out. He stepped back and held on near the makeshift ventilator. A small hand of wind wiped his face.

At last the rack rattled toward the barn. Lilly with her fork, the grandfather, and three cousins to help relaying.

He hit his measuring pieces together like clappers. "Say, Lilly, sing that one about the fountain, will you?"

Singing, she forked the laths out of the rack. The relayers fell to work with a will. He backed, measured, and hung the long limp plants that seemed to swim like water weeds in the hot half-muddied depths of a stream. The boy below him used lots of elbow grease in handing them up so that he bent and fumbled little, eyes often shut.

The relayers hopped down. He blinked thru burning sweat at rolly logs. Directly below the hulking machinery. The blood passed like a horn into his eyes.

Louie hurried up for inspection. "Fine, you got han's quick's needle. You finish here. We got more hangin' for you. Nice tobacco. Rye's one good stuff for turn over." He grinned admiringly at him. "That's right. The doctor calls up. Your ma wan's talk to you."

Chester stuck out his jaw. "I won't talk." He leaned against a beam while they filed out to the field.

The next load would probably be the last before dinner. The men would gather round near the barn door. There would be a chance for

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that Kanuk to wisecrack in Lilly's presence. And there he, trying to climb down, legs feeling for the logs in the tier below like the feelers of some bug . . . everybody giving him the horselaugh . . .

A far-off murmur caught him in his tight corner. He stared out in the distance until he saw a speck tiny as a tobacco seed. It grew and hung like a hover fly over the trees. The plane swerved and flew south coming close, hawking over the fields the way a dragon fly does, and disappeared in the sun.

Chester's eyes glowed. He stuck his hands out into the light. Lindy's face flashed on his palms and swept like a thundercloud into the sky. The "mystic photo" had never come to him like that before.

The clang of the iron wheel near the farmhouse woke him with a start. Noon signal. He stiffened. He must lower himself to the second tier quickly. Then jump. The shock would help him. Anyway it would save him from having to hang that afternoon, from the unbearable disgrace of backing out. One fall, and he would know what a great fall really means. His fear would pass from him like a great dusting off.

A little shaky, he found his pipe. He must smoke the tobacco Louie had given him, unmixed stuff that could knock a bull down. A few puffs always helped a bit. He puffed until it burnt like red pepper. He smoked like a house afire; his head swelled to the size of a melon.

The unhitched horses jingled toward the stable. In his pocket he fumbled for the sacred medal that had lain in the pleasant valley. He hung it round his neck. As he bent, he felt himself caught as between spokes . . . Lilly's distant voice . . . "Lazy bugs, Doctor Tom's car . . . an' there's your sister . . ."

"Lady bugs, lady bugs . . ."

In another moment he would be down to smash that damn Kanuk for a goal. He leaned against a ventilator.

Up the footpath, all bundled up, between Tom and Tillie, staggered his mother bawling like an appledrunk cow. Lilly ran before her, smiling and reassuring.

He shattered his pipe against the wall. He let the wheel whip him off the plank. Something slammed his shoulders and twisted him. He fell head first. The earth shot up and reached him with its sure fist.



WINTER IN MY HEART

Albert Halper

When I was a very small boy my folks lived in a cheap cold flat near the railroad, and the wind blew hard. Negro families from the South Side began moving into the neighborhood and pretty soon the grammar school was more black than white. I walked home along the curb with the colored kids, carrying my primer. The colored kids didn't like the cold and after walking a block or so they began running home. Their stockings came down as they ran and the bigger kids left the smaller ones behind.

One small kid stopped at the curb and began bawling. He was about seven years old. I was six. As I went by the kid grew ashamed, wiped his nose on his sleeve and began to look surly. He trailed me for two blocks. Snow began falling. When I came near home the colored kid, still walking behind, began calling me dirty names, but did not come closer. He was smaller than I, and I could have beaten him up, but I did not feel like fighting. It was too cold. The snow kept falling on the street. I went upstairs into the flat and my mother took my coat off for me. Then I went into the front room where the coal stove was burning and, pressing my nose against the window, watched the falling snow for a long time. The colored kid who had called me dirty names was standing near the curb outside. He still looked surly. He kicked some snow with his shoe, stared up at the house, then went away. I watched him walking up the street. When he reached the corner the wind, rushing from off the railroad yards, caught his coat and blew it out like a sail. He bent his head, leaned forward and kept on, and from his little sunken head and quivering back I knew he was bawling again. Pretty soon I lost sight of him.

That night a blizzard came up and in the morning great drifts lay piled in the streets. The railroad company used powerful snowplows to clear the tracks. On my way to school I made a detour and stood watching the huge brushes whirling the dry powdered snow away, blowing it across the yards.

Then I spied the colored kid who had called me dirty names the day before. He was with his mother. They were hunting for lumps of coal that had fallen from the cars; neither wore gloves and I saw their brown hands searching through the white snow for the coal, feeling for the

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lumps. The kid made it a point not to look my way, but afterwards, when his mother wasn't watching, he turned quickly and threw a lump of coal at me. It struck me in the side, but did not hurt very much. They walked up the tracks and went behind some box-cars.

One day in spring, when the sun was hot against the sidewalks, some one found a nickel in the school yard and ran across the street to buy candy. When he came back he had a whole bagful of cheap sticky stuff. Everybody crowded around him. The kid shoved himself through and came toward me. He held out the biggest piece in the bag, but I wouldn't take any. It was the colored kid who had called me dirty names and had thrown a lump of coal at me.

In the end we fought, and before the school bell rang I beat him. I forced him up against the building and hammered him hard against the body with my fists. His chest was bony and my knuckles began to hurt after a while. I had him crying good. One of the teachers on the second floor stood watching all the time and toward the end rapped sharply once or twice against the window with her key.

The crowd broke around us as the bell rang and the colored kid stopped crying to hunt for his bag of candy. Some one had taken it. For a second he stood stupified, looking helplessly at me, then, raising his fists to his eyes, began bawling and screaming all his might. The yard was empty. Both of us stood alone in the empty quiet yard and he kept on crying.

Finally I helped him look for the bag of candy, but both of us knew we would never find it.



FIVE POEMS

Norman Macleod

EARLY BATTLE CRY

The onion skin of our thoughts was transparent as dawn
In clear weather: we had not learned to hide
The intuition of our hands and what we felt
Women should mean to us. We had not smirched our desires
With the vice of substitution nor tied our vows

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To single approximations of sublimity. Together we resolved
To battle with compromise. Our minds were scientific
And we inclined to suspect our experiments
Would confound the world: we looked forward with equanimity
To the astonishment of many mortals. But now
We apprenticed our hearts to dalliance
With dew. Upon mountains we were rams
In stormy weather: we built fires upon the continental divides
And defied the gales to extinguish the beacons
Of our domicile. Our hopes were viable
Of youth and we stormed the barometers of the wind
With our passion: we could not be cooled.
Look! Is it not admirable, our courage?
Can the feel of our hearts be a glow
Like the core of the earth?

ENTRAINMENT

The corazons of the mountains were steeped with flint
And we struck the fire of our hearts
That our eyes be healed. The wounds of our senses
Were soothed with a constant balm (we saw that our happiness
Consisted of this.) We were young so nothing for us
Was adulterated with regret. Before us we visualized
The stretch of years like a trek in the mountains.
Along the way we knew we would find the discovery
Of our loves and many oases would hearten us
To the weather. Drouths we did not fear
Nor heartache. Everything would be as fresh as our blood
And rich with the seasoned experience of life.
We clasped hands with each other as acknowledgement
Of our power. We were sure that we would be as victorious
As eagles in flight and therefore could afford
To be brothers.

IN MOUNTAINS OF THE FLATHEAD

The ploughshares of the sun were shafted with light.
The acreage of the sky was turned
To the shine of the weather. Our hearts were glad
To remember the many summers and the buckskins we had foiled

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And the fires of their flesh, wild to the taste
Of our mouth. The world was irradiated
With the health of desire. There were no Indian girls
We had not found good: the touch of their hands
Was seasoned with warmth of their bodies
(There it was that their blood expended its energy
And circled back.) The tepees were pyramids as white
And soft as smoke and burnt along the bottoms where the earth
Established contact with communion of domicile,
Erected temporarily: fresh and hale
As the whirlwinds in the summer (the dust would rise
Like an idol to be demolished and leveled
To the earth again.) I think the secret of our hearts
Was this: that the mountains were gardens
For our thought. Our brains flowered like Indian
Paintbrush and the tang of its scent was strong
As a vigorous dawn in the Rockies. The girls were ours
In the way that we all had sprung from the loam.
We possessed nothing and thereby won
The tremendous horizons of the world. We hoarded nothing
But our treasure was manifold.

OWLS CAME OVER THE MOUNTAINS

Chinooks were harbingers of treachery: we no longer
Relied on the spring and the sun was fond of disturbing
Our pulse with showers of summer
And growth to be quelled with the rain.
We had been naive of our thoughts too long:
We repulsed the promise of ardors
Alien to our environment and cooled with the age
Of disillusion in the autumn of grief.
The cycles repeated themselves in our brains,
Though the dialectics of love were sprightly
And surface distilled: we went to a long hermitage
When the owls came over the mountains.

RAINY SEASONS OF THE HEART

The mountain lakes were full of their brilliance
And it brightened our eyes so they glistened:

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It was not tears that shone upon our face
Or we would have wept with the impossibility of tears.
The high prairies are plateaus for our knowledge.
There we roam like panthers in the dusk
With the moon a guidance. We have learned many things:
How pheasants detail with danger and how the stags
Are a swift retreat on the snowline and how
Scrub cedars are strong with the thunder birds
Decrying the lightning. We have ritual here
Of our lives and we devote love to our offspring.
It has happened that we have thought of many countries
And found them one with our hearts. When we were young
The distinctions of our experience had seemed
As a proof of our desires, but now we know
The limitations of our sight. We have come to believe
Nothing is ever the same again as it was before
Or will be in the future. Our perspective
Is hinged on the curve of the continent.
We recognize defeat and are sure to be soft
Like the soil in the rainy seasons.



GREEN SUMMER

Roderick Lull

In that part of the state it is almost always green in the summer. Even in drought years, when the roads are dusty and the cattle are dying of thirst in the ranches to the south, it is green and pleasant there, and there are many fine houses with fountains playing in the front gardens and gay awnings covering the long, wide verandahs. I had been away for four years and as we came back from the ferry I kept thinking of how green it was, and how pleasant, and wondering if part of my brother's mind was thinking of that too. At that time I had been home for ten days but I had not been outside the house a great deal, because of Alice, so it was still all very new to me. On the verandah of one of the houses we passed there were many people drinking out of long cool glasses, and I wondered who the house belonged to, whether it belonged to someone

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I had once known. But I decided that it was a very new house and that the people were all strangers to me.

"That is a new house since my time," I said to my brother.

"Yes, it is a new house," he said.

He was very pale, and it made me unhappy to look at him. When I looked at him I thought vividly of his wife, Alice, lying still and sick upstairs in our house, and I remembered the telegram I had sent him. I had puzzled a long time over that telegram, writing words and then crossing them out, and writing in new words. It is very hard to write a telegram to your brother telling him that his wife is ill and that he must come home at once. It is particularly hard when you know it will not be long before she must die, and you cannot tell him that in the telegram. For a while I had considered telephoning him, but I had discarded the idea because I was afraid. It would have been even harder to say what I had to say over the telephone than to write it out in a telegram.

The road twisted and was narrow, so I drove slowly. The car was too big for the road, and I wondered why my mother had not bought a smaller car that you could swing around the turns swiftly. But of course she did not drive herself, I thought, and the big car was more comfortable, so naturally she would have it.

My brother said, "Listen. I want you to tell me the truth."

"Of course," I said.

"I want you to tell me how sick she really is."

"She's pretty sick," I said.

"But she never had any sign of heart trouble before. She always had a good heart."

"The doctor says it can happen very suddenly. Usually it happens very suddenly. One day you think you have a good heart and the next—why, the next you find your heart is bad. It happens like that."

My brother said, "Oh!" Then he said, "Then it is really very serious."

I looked at the speedometer. We were going thirty-five miles an hour. I stepped on the throttle a little and ran the car up to forty-five. "It is very serious," I said.

"But she'll get over it all right."

I looked at him. Then I looked back at the road. "I may as well tell you now," I said. "The doctor says she will never get over it."

He took it well. All he did was stiffen a little. I felt him stiffen. He was silent for what seemed a long time. "Never?"

"The doctors can be wrong," I said. "Doctors are often wrong."

"Not very often."

I didn't contradict him. I tried to think of times when the doctors had been wrong with people I knew, and I couldn't think of a single time. They have made great progress with medical science in a few years. Very great progress. The doctors are almost always right.

"I was afraid of that," he said. He spoke very quietly. Much more quietly than he used to speak when I was last home, four years before. And he had grown older. I was surprised to see how grey he was. You never expect people to grow older, and if you are with them much you never notice it. But it surprises you if you have not seen them for a long time and all of a sudden they come up to you, come from a ferry-boat, as my mother had done.

I didn't answer him. He said, "It is curious that you should have come home at just this time. You came just four days before, didn't you?"

"Four days before," I said.

"It's very unpleasant for you." When he said that I realized how very shocked he was. It was then I really began to feel pity for him. Before that I had only felt great pity for Alice, because she was beautiful and was dying. The last few nights I had awakened, thinking of that, thinking that she was beautiful and that she was dying, and for a long time after I had not been able to sleep. But now I felt pity for my brother because he was so shocked that he took refuge behind polite, generous phrases.

"That is nothing, of course," I said.

I knew he was looking at me, but I did not turn my head.

"But it is very curious."

"Very curious," I said.

I looked some more at the fine houses we were passing, and thought again how green everything was. In the country where I had been it was brown and hot, and there were no fine houses as the people were all poor. It was nice to be home again, even though Alice was ill, and to know that there were houses like those in the world and people who were not poor and who lived well. But I had been so long away that I felt a little alien and estranged.

My brother said, "I forgot to ask you how your work is going." His voice was very flat.

"All right," I said. "I think I'm making progress. Later on I may have a show. Some people think I'm ready for one."

"That's fine," he said. I looked at him. His face was very thin, and his eyes were heavy. He needed rest badly.

"It is good to have you back," he said. Now his voice was remote—a tired, heavy voice. I wished that he would not talk any more. It hurt a little to hear him, and I knew how much more it must hurt for him to talk. But still, talking was probably easier than being silent.

"When you go to see her," I said, "you must be very quiet. There must be no excitement. I was told to tell you that."

"I will be very quiet," he said.

"She must have absolute quiet. And of course you'll be cheerful. It will be good for her. She isn't looking well, but you won't notice that—I mean, you won't show her you notice how she looks. I don't need to tell you that."

"I know," he said.

I slowed down for a series of sharp turns. We would be home in fifteen minutes, I guessed. We could not be much more than ten miles from there. I looked at the bay, far below us, and the ships on it and the bare hills in the distance. As I looked at them I remembered how I had thought of the view when I was away, and how I had hungered to see it again. But it was less impressive than I had remembered. Distances were not so great, nor the bay so wide at that point, nor the hills so high and rolling. My memory had fooled me. Memories often do that, I thought.

"Let's go faster," my brother said.

I stepped the car up to fifty, and hoped we would meet no one on the turns. I was forced to hug the left-hand bank to make them at all. We were lucky and met no one, and when we came to a straightaway again I pressed on the throttle until the speedometer said seventy. The road was not quite smooth, and a rear spring kept squeaking. It made a high-pitched, irritating noise.

"There's a rough spring," I said.

"It needs grease," my brother said.

"Yes, it needs grease." For a minute I listened to the motor. It was rather loud, and there was a valve knock. The car was not in very good shape.

"The car needs work done on it," I said. "It's running hot, too."

"Yes," my brother said. I did not say anything more about the car. We did not speak again until I turned it into our grounds and stopped beside the house.

I got out first and waited for him. He got out of his side slowly and stiffly. "My bags can be brought in later," he said.

"All right." We went into the house together. As soon as the door

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closed behind us it was very cool and dark and quiet. Mother was waiting in the hall.

She said, "Peter," and kissed him.

He said, "I'll go upstairs right away."

"In a little while," mother said. "The nurse will tell you when you can go up. She knows you're here."

Peter said, "All right," and we went into the library. It was dark and cool in there too. There was a bottle of whiskey and some soda on the table and I poured two drinks. But Peter waved the one I offered him away so I drank them both.

Peter said, "David told me all about it."

Mother said, "Yes, Peter."

He took off his overcoat and threw it over a chair. He stood beside the fireplace with his hands in his pockets and looked at us. I thought that he looked much older, standing there, than he really was. His face was very thin, and there were deep lines in it. At one time he had done a great deal of swimming and riding and had been brown, but he had given that sort of thing up. He was too busy. That was because he was successful, I thought. He was so successful that he was wearing himself out, and had no time for the things he would have really enjoyed doing.

"I don't know what to say," Peter said. "These things are so sudden. Though of course I knew it was serious. David's telegram showed me it was serious, because it said so little. If it had said more I would have thought it was not so very serious."

I was suddenly sorry I had not said more in the telegram. All I had said was, "Alice taken ill come home at once Mother and David." At the time it seemed to me the best telegram I could send. But now I understood that it was the wrong kind of telegram to send under the circumstances.

Peter said, "I should have been here."

"There was no way of knowing beforehand," mother said. "You reproach yourself. It happened one noon. She had been playing tennis with David all morning, and then at noon it happened, quite without warning. The doctor said that was particularly unusual. The illness last year was responsible for it."

"The pneumonia," Peter said.

Mother said, "Yes." She was not looking at him.

"And of course she has always been delicate," mother went on. "But it will be all right. Only she must be kept quiet. So very quiet."

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Peter smiled. "Very quiet," he said. "She must stay in bed all the time."

"Not always," mother said. "Later on she'll be able to go outdoors in a chair. The thing is to keep her quiet and to keep excitement away from her. And she mustn't exercise in any way."

"In a wheel chair," Peter said. "She'll be able to go outdoors in a wheel chair."

Neither of us said anything. After a minute he walked to the other end of the library and stood in the window for a while. Then he came back.

"Next year," he said, "we were going to Canada for the fishing. We were going way up to the end of Vancouver Island by automobile, to where the road ends, and then pack in. There is fine fishing there."

"Very fine," I said.

"We had our plans all made," he said. "It was going to be a wonderful trip. We were to stay two months, all alone but for the guides. We have never been alone together for that long a time."

I looked away from him. Mother was looking down at the table, playing with a glass.

"That was next year," he said. He spoke so quietly it was hard to understand him. But his voice was firm. Very firm, and very low. A strange voice.

"I know," I said. "You wrote me about it."

"Yes. I wrote you about it."

For a long time no one spoke. Then there was a knock on the door and mother said "Come in."

It was the nurse. She was fat and blonde and capable and she had blue eyes and marvelous white teeth. She was a good nurse.

She looked at my brother. "You may come upstairs now, Mr. Brent," she said.

Peter said, "Thank you." He walked out of the room and the nurse followed him. She left the door open. We heard them going quickly upstairs. That is, we heard Peter. The nurse wore rubber-soled shoes and was very light on her feet, even though she was fat, and we could not hear her at all.

Mother said, "It's so horrible."

I took another drink. I thought of Alice as I had last seen her, yesterday. She had seemed smaller, more fragile, than she had a week before, but oddly, I thought she was more beautiful. I had looked at her,

lying in bed, and thought she was the most beautiful person I had ever seen.

"Yes," I said.

"There's no reason why it should have happened. It isn't—isn't just."

I said, "No." I sat down and lit a cigarette. I sat there for a long time without saying anything of Alice and how she and Peter were to have gone to Canada for the fishing next year. I had once been fishing in Canada. It is very fine. Steelhead and cutthroat trout and bass—all kinds of fishing. It is very gamey fishing, the gamiest, perhaps, on this continent. It was too bad that Alice and Peter would be unable to go.

I smoked two more cigarettes, and then I heard a door open upstairs. It was held open a minute, then it closed gently. That would be Peter, I thought. I looked at my watch and was surprised to see that I had been in the library for more than an hour.

"It's Peter," I said.

Mother said, "Yes."

"You'd better be with him alone for a while. I'm going to town. I'll be back later."

Mother said, "All right," and I went quickly out of the room. When I reached the front door I heard Peter on the stairs behind me and looked back. He looked at me, and I thought again how old he seemed these days. I waited a minute to see if he would speak, but he did not so I went out and closed the door.

There was still a good deal of sun outside, and for an instant it blinded me. Then I got into the car and drove to town, drove very fast. I had dinner in town and did not come home until ten o'clock. When I went past the library the door opened and Peter came out. I glimpsed the room before he closed the door, and saw that there was no one there.

"Mother has gone to bed?" I said.

"Yes," Peter said.

I looked at him for a long time and suddenly stepped forward and laid my hand on his arm. I had never done that before.

I said, "Peter."

He was very still. "If only she were dead," he said to me. "It would be so much better."

"Peter," I said again.

He did not hear. "If she had only died before I came back. It would have been such a little thing. She is going to die. And it would have been so much better."

His voice was tired. Then I understood him, and I stared at the

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floor, wanting to speak to him, and knowing I would say nothing because there was nothing I could say.



MORNING SUN

Karlton Kelm

Jim slammed the door after him and walked down the street. He was walking to work. He was walking to duty.

The sun greeted him brightly. But there was nothing in him to respond. It was morning sun, thin, fresh, new. As yet it hadn't absorbed all the strife of the day. But Jim had. And he was thick, stale, old.

Still the damn thing kept pulling at him, the sun, pulling that other self thru the pores of his skin, upward, upward . . . like a bird.

O god, he muttered and looked full in its face. His eyes flooded with tiny diamonds, and blinded he looked down, down at his clumsy shoeleather, down at the dull earth. And he set his mouth in an agony and walked on.

Now it was in his throat, the sun, and the pain of its infinite possibilities. O why must it shine like a mock, like a lie, like so manifest a promise. Why couldn't it be always shady, shady and forgetful.

Goodmorning, Jim.

Goodmorning, Joe.

The same man he passed each day. The same men. Their voices flat, dutiful, without sun in them. Only sun in the aching chords of their throats, inarticulate, all that emotion, all that longing hidden in retrospect. Wasted.

The same fruit store, the same butcher shop. A woman in the window, studying a pile of oranges, absorbed, her hand on her cheek, then on the oranges, feeling them, pressing them, then her hand back on her cheek again, her whole body given to a pile of oranges.

She was a wise woman. Preoccupied with oranges, dustcloths, and screaming children, she got along. Somehow. Perhaps the sun was deep in her stomach, somewhere, but she kept it digested under mashed potatoes and gravy.

Jim eyed a brick in the gutter. He wanted to pick it up and hurl it thru the window, at the pile of oranges, at the complacent woman, then stand back and laugh and laugh while the crowd gathered quickly, while

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cops clamored around the corner. Then to break away from them all and run, run, dash thru the sun in an ecstasy of freedom, of expression, as often in dreams, or in adolescence, outrunning everybody, darting, flying, thru space, thru woods and rivers and strange haunting glens. To some grand and ultimate adventure.

But he was on his way to work. Oranges cost money. So did plate-glass windows. And he wasn't a very good runner any more.

Paper, mister?

No.

Aw, please! this is the last one.

No!

The kid wiped his nose on his sleeve and trailed after him.

Aw, mister, yuh gotta help. I wanna grow up rich and have adventure.

Jim jerked about and looked at the kid. He was a sturdy little fellow, but shabby, except for his eyes, enormous and delicate blue things that looked and looked and dug into the future with a confidence that made Jim want to throw sand in them or something.

You'll never have any adventure, kid. You'll sell papers till you're old enough to work in a factory. Then you'll work over a machine all day, every day. That's all, kid.

The kid wiped his nose again but said nothing.

You'll marry some dame working over another machine and you'll have some kids together, but you'll soon get tired of that. Then you'll wonder why you didn't just look out for yourself . . . hop a freight or something and see the world. And every morning when you start out to work again you'll say O god another day? and you'll wish you had the guts to break away even then.

The kid tried to take big steps like Jim. He squinted up at Jim, the sun in his eyes.

You talk funny like my old man, mister. My old man says they aint any adventure no more. Only for gangsters . . . Well, that's what I want to be, mister, a *gangster*!

Jim swallowed hard.

Here, you young scamp, I'll buy your rotten paper.

Gee, mister!

He flung the kid a coin and quickened his pace. But the kid kept up with him, skipping a bit to do so.

My old man says that Columbus and Napoleon and them guys was

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all sort of gangsters. Anyways he says if they was living today that's what they'd be.

Jim unfolded the paper. *Moron Murders Child With Bare Hands.*
Keen murder, aint it, mister?

Jim hurried thru the morbid details.

My old man says people got to have adventure some way. He says they got to do *something* before they die.

Jim folded the paper, jabbed it into his pocket, looked fiercely ahead.

Your old man's right, kid. A man's got to do *something*.

They walked along in silence. The kid's eyes were very big, very wondering. Jim's eyes, very small, and a bit startled.

Well, this is where I turn for school, mister.

Jim grabbed the kid by the arm.

Listen, kid, let's you and me play hooky. I aint going to work, you aint going to school. We're going to have an adventure.

The kid's eyes sparkled.

Go out in the woods, mister?

Sure, why not? Follow a little stream up, up . . . look for strange birds, find a deserted shack, even pick wildflowers, anything, *anything* . . . a little freedom!

The kid laughed. Suddenly he was so happy.

Sure, mister, I'll go. I don't like schóol anyway. They don't understand about gangsters and things.

They turned down a side street that made for the river. A zest in their shoeleather, an apprehension in their bodies. They raised their faces to the sun, drank it in, reflected it, until they blossomed, like flowers. For they were suddenly important, distinctive, individual. And all because they were playing hooky.

You won't lose your job, will you, mister?

Maybe. I dunno. I don't care.

Now the houses grew thinner, the trees thicker, the sky bluer, closer, touchable. The breezes came, soft, compelling, fluttering thru their hairs like butterflies. Now the river, gleaming, gleaming, gently pushing on to something soft and good and inevitable.

They took a footpath that followed the river, winding, silent, bordered with bright berried bushes and the drowsy stir of small living things. The kid yawned and stretched his firm little body. He was tired walking. He wanted to lie down in the warm sand and go to sleep. But Jim urged him on, faster, faster, his hands clenched tightly in his pockets, his throat thick with compulsion.

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Don't it make you feel sort of wicked, mister, running off like this?

Jim's breath came quickly. He turned and grinned at the kid.

Wicked, that's right, kid. But it makes life different. Being good is just doing things all over again, day after day. Never be good, kid. It's bad for you.

The kid looked surprised. He looked a little scared. Jim watched him closely. He imagined how brown and living he was under those shabby gray clothes. He wanted to ask the kid to take off his clothes and stand naked in the sun, like a little brown savage, with the blue eyes of an angel, splendid in freedom, real in abandon. It would be something beautiful. Life a picture . . . But the kid wouldn't understand. He would think . . .

The footpath fell away from the river, slowly sank down into a cool gladed glen with wet-smelling rocks and soft-dripping springwater. The place was shady, secluded, the sun was too low yet to reach it. It looked kind of blue and hazy, as if set apart for an adventure.

Jim stood still. He looked, then he knew why he had brought the kid here. One of his hands tightened about the newspaper in his pocket. The other grabbed the kid's arm, pulling him down into the cool fragrance of the glen.

Hey, leggo, mister! I want to stay up there in the sun!

Jim picked up the kid and carried him. The kid struggled, cried out. But Jim didn't pay any attention. He set him down in the shade, under a rock and took off all his clothes. The kid stopped struggling. He just shuddered. His little firm body wasn't brown at all. It was white. So white, so pure, so helpless. And those delicate blue eyes were so open, so injured, so hurt. Jim couldn't stand those eyes. Something in his body burst open and he sprang back from the kid, then his shoulders caved in and he threw himself down in the cool grasses, his face pressed in blossoms, and he sobbed aloud in an agony.

The kid lay there naked, watching him cry. He didn't run away. Nor did he even look scared now. He just looked hurt, bewildered, and a little sorry. Then quietly he gathered up his clothes.

I didn't mind, mister, really I didn't.

But his voice fluttered, like the wings of a butterfly.

Jim didn't answer. He was still in a heap, sobbing, groaning. So the kid put on his clothes wiped his nose on his sleeve, and slipped up the side of the glen. Then Jim sat up and wiped his eyes. He took the newspaper out of his pocket and read more about the murder. The fierce light came to his eyes again.

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But after a while it died out and he stood up, dragged slowly up the path, into the sunlight. The kid was nowhere in sight. Jim tore up the newspaper and threw it in the river. The river was still gleaming. Then his loose mouth stiffened a bit and he started back to town. If he hurried he wouldn't be so very late for work after all.

O duty was everything he detested, but what of it? He did it and he did not starve or freeze. Nor did he hang. He got along.

Now the sky was darkening. The sun went under a cloud. The air was chill. Jim broke into a run. He was so glad he hadn't murdered the kid. Because it was good to have a job after all. It was even good to have a wife, and children. Perhaps he was too old for an adventure.



THE SHRINE AT SAN JOSE

Raymond Otis

They buried him on the hill-top because he asked to be buried there. That was four months ago.

Juliano, troubled, walked the hill by the light of the moon, for sleep eluded him. It was bright, the moonlight—bright enough to see each stone and bunch of tufted grass; yucca plants upthrust their clustered bayonets like black rays of shadow.

The man who lay buried on the hill-top was Juliano's father. But they had moved him lately at the behest of his widow, who thought it was no fit place for a God-fearing man to lie. They had moved him, then, and put him down in the cemetery, the *campo santo*—holy ground—at the base of the hill.

Oblivious to the chill of the autumn night, Juliano walked along the slope of the hill, around and around, mounting by degrees to the summit where an empty hole marked his father's former resting place. He paused once on the way, feeling himself swept by a sudden, cleansing wave of penitence, and dropped to his knees on the rock-strewn path. Head bowed, he sent a paternoster heavenwards and followed it with an extemporaneous prayer for the peace of his father's soul, then continued his slow ascent of the hill. For Juliano had cause to doubt the peace of his father's soul. The old man had died from his zeal, from penitential discipline, inflicted upon himself. Bodily injury, done in a mood of frantic, mad grief upon the contemplation of his sins, those of his family

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and friends, had killed him. He said he would atone for all, by his own chastisement.

Juliano, reaching the summit of the conical hill, stopped in his tracks, gaping. The white wooden cross was there again; the earth was neatly raised over a new grave, where only the day before had been the vacant hole. Juliano crossed himself slowly, while his mind raced to account for this wonder. Kneeling beside the mound, he thrust his hand into the soft earth. It was still warm, from the intense desert sun.

"Somebody moved him back again . . ." he muttered. "Madre de Dios . . . who has done this thing?"

Before they went out to finish the chili harvest next morning, Juliano and his brother and his brother-in-law climbed the cone-shaped hill. They stood bare-headed, silently, around the new grave and stared down at it.

"He's there," said Juliano. "Last night I found him."

"Who brought him here," the brother asked.

"Why was he moved?"

Working faster than their custom commanded, the three men removed the remains of their father and placed them once more in holy ground, using burlap sacks rudely sewn together for a winding-sheet. When they had finished, they brushed their hands on their overalls and departed for the fields.

Still, however, Juliano was compelled by a nebulous uneasiness to leave his wife and bed by night and wander the vicinity of the hill in the moonlight. Sleep, while the moon shone, seemed to evade his restless eyes. It was a worrying thing, because he attributed it to some discord in his father's peace, and he was haunted by a fear that all was not well with the old man. He determined, therefore, to keep watch for a while, and to catch, if he could, the marauding devils who were disturbing his bones.

For a week the moon waned. The hour of Juliano's wanderings became later and later. At last the moon vanished, and Juliano could sleep. Nothing had come of his vigils—but on a day when he visited the hill-top at noon, the cross, the grave, were there again.

This called for a more persistent watchfulness. They replaced the father in the *campo santo* and for three weeks following kept watch by night in turn. Juliano and his brother-in-law, being married, were allotted the first and last thirds of the night, while the younger brother, as yet a single man, watched through the midnight period of darkness.

Juliano, who alternated with his brother-in-law on the early morning watch, came one night to take up his vigilance and found his young brother in a wild state of agitation. His teeth were chattering and he trembled violently, and Juliano thought at first it was the cold that ailed him.

"What's the matter with you?" he said in Spanish, not too kindly.

"I've seen him!" the youth cried, "By the hand of Our Father Jesus, I saw him rise up and walk to the top of the hill! He's still up there. He hasn't come down. Stay and see—it may be he'll come back."

No skeptic, Juliano began to tremble himself. The two of them sat down beneath a great cottonwood tree and composed themselves as comfortably as the cold night permitted. They wrapped their sheepskin collars close about their necks, but the cold crept in and made them shiver. After a while, Juliano discovered that the light of the stars was enough to see by; but there was nothing out of the ordinary to see. His house was lost in the blackness under the trees which surrounded it; beyond, along the river, the alfalfa field was a flat sheen of grey. And the cone-shaped hill rose up in front of them, as symmetrical as an ant-hill. The valley road ran between them and the hill.

Having no watch, Juliano saw how the big dipper changed its place in the sky, and reckoned time by it. More than an hour must have passed. His brother had fallen asleep in his sheepskin coat; the merest suggestion of light over the eastern mountains promised the dawn. Suddenly, Juliano was startled by a rock which, dislodged from the hillside, tumbled down and stopped almost at his feet in the road. He jumped up, painfully, for all his joints had grown stiff, and stared intently into the darkness which shrouded the slope. Was that a vague form moving? He stepped back, frightened, yet curious. Fear won; it froze him in his place. While he strained to see in the darkness, all life was suspended within him. His heart leapt to his throat and hung there, still, expectant, like everything else. A faint stirring on the hillside released him; animation returned in a rush and he turned and fled, leaving his young brother to sleep on under the cottonwood, Juliano ran to the middle of the alfalfa field before he paused to look back. *Madre de Dios!* The thing was following him, like a wisp of mist detached from a cloud! His flight was headlong now, until at last he collapsed exhausted under a willow at the stream's edge. He buried his head in his sheepskin coat and waited, trembling. Ah, there it was—it had caught him—it was tugging at his collar!

"Go away, for the love of Our Father Jesus!" he moaned. "I did what I thought was right. We thought you liked it better in holy

ground. Leave me, and lie where you please!"

"It's only I, Juliano," a voice above him said, "your brother."

Juliano peered out from his collar. "You? Oh . . . Did you see him? Where is he?"

"I didn't see anything except you running. I thought you had seen him, so I ran after you."

Juliano sat up. While he told his brother what he had seen on the hillside and how that shred of disembodied cloud had chased him across the alfalfa field, both grew pale under their dark Mexican skins and shuddered, each in his own misery of fear. This was a terrible thing, to see their father's ghost abroad and not to know the reason why.

"What can we do?" the younger one wondered. "What does he want, do you think? What does he lack, that makes him roam?"

"I don't know," said Juliano, "but I think it has something to do with the way he died. It was wrong to whip himself like that—the priest said it was—remember? But it's too late now . . ."

As soon as it was light, the brothers hurried to the hilltop, fearful of what they would see. Yes, the cross and grave were there again!

They were not long in telling their friends about the ghost of the old man. In a day it was common talk up and down the narrow valley where they lived, enclosed by barren and desolate hills like the one on which their father demanded to repose. Groups of men gathered at noon-day in the shade of cottonwoods and discussed the affair. In hushed tones, they talked about it at night around their stoves. The women thought it was a holy sign, and most of the men agreed; drawn by curiosity and awe, they came in wagons, on foot, in battered automobiles to the scene of the miracle and climbed the cone-shaped hill to say a prayer for their dead. And Juliano, seeing that, was inspired to leave a box at the grave-side into which the thoughtful might drop their nickels and pennies and dimes. If the proceeds guaranteed it, he would build an enclosure over and around the grave, that it might become a permanent shrine. For obviously, the hand of God was in it.

In this, he secured the sanction of the parish priest, and let it be known that such was his intention. He hoped in this way to quiet his father's soul and end his nightly roaming.

The thing was done. In a month's time the funds were sufficient to buy the lumber and Juliano and his brothers set about the task of raising an edifice over the grave. They built it plainly, small, a little larger than the burial place, and gabled its roof and perched a white wooden

cross on the peak. Then they painted it white and made an easy path to the summit; after a number of masses were said for the old man, they resumed the quiet of their lives, convinced that their father's ghost was laid.

As, indeed, it was. He was never seen again, and stones ceased mysteriously to roll down the hillside. The valley was at peace, and renowned for its own local miracle. The priest was pleased at the piety of his flock. Even the old man's brothers in penitence were satisfied, for there were others in the valley, a lay order of penitents who believed that atonement was best assured through self-inflicted punishment. Their brother was at peace in the place of their choosing, and it had been accomplished with more glamor than they had foreseen.



GEORGE AND CHARLIE

William March

George Owens was a quiet, methodical young man who always hung his towels up to dry before throwing them into the laundry hamper and who paid his bill regularly each Saturday night. In a word, he was an ideal lodger, and Mrs. Maddern often wished there were more like him in the world, now that necessity forced her to turn her home into a boarding house.

George was twenty-two years old in those days. He was red-faced and plump, with short arms and legs and mild brown eyes, and he worked for the Acme Building Supplies Corporation, a concern that manufactured roofing tiles and other building material.

One day Mrs. Maddern told him that her nephew was coming to town to work in the traffic department of the Excelsior Cotton Mills and had written asking to stay with her. But, unfortunately, every room in the house was filled just at that time, and, since George had such a big room, she wondered if he would share it with her nephew until something else turned up. George preferred being alone: he was taking a course in Business Administration that winter by mail and he disliked having the routine of his life disturbed, but he didn't know what to say to Mrs. Maddern without hurting her feelings. "If you don't like the arrangement after you meet Charlie, just say so," she kept repeating; "because if it's not entirely satisfactory to you, I don't want you to share your room

for a minute." George nodded his head: "All right, Mrs. Maddern—Just do what you want to." Mrs. Maddern said: "That's right nice of you, George, and I appreciate it. I appreciate it in more ways than one, because I think a sound young man like you will have a good influence on Charlie. He's a sweet boy, at heart, but he hasn't acted right in the past, and he's caused his mother many a tear and heartache."

Charlie, it seemed, had revolutionary ideas which were always getting him in trouble. "He had a fine job in Memphis," said Mrs. Maddern; "as fine a job as any boy only twenty years old could ask for, but he got into an argument, and lost it. It was something about a colored man drinking water out of the same glass that white people used. I don't know the straight of it, but Charlie defended the colored man's action and said a lot of things he shouldn't have said and the result was he lost his position."

"Well," said George, "I should think he *would* lose his job under those conditions."

That night Charlie Banks arrived and Mrs. Maddern introduced the boys. Charlie was somewhat above middle height. He wore his hair brushed straight back and plastered to his skull; he had a large, high-bridged nose with a cleft in the tip of it; his chest was slightly sunken and his shoulders hunched forward; his hips were so flat and undeveloped that one wondered how his trousers remained in place. At first the boys were very polite, each anxious not to obtrude on the privacy of the other, but after dinner, when they felt they knew each other better, they began to exchange their views of life. It was two o'clock before they finally went to bed.

In the office the next morning, George discussed his new roommate with Isabel Leary, one of the stenographers. Isabel admired George a great deal and listened attentively to everything he said. "This fellow I'm telling you about is a socialist, or something," said George. "He thinks nobody should own property except the State. He says the desire to own property is the basis of injustice."

"Why, I never heard anything so silly," said Isabel.

"That's what I told him, too," said George. "I said: 'Ideas like that aren't sound; they won't work out, in practice'"

"Why don't you tell Mrs. Maddern, frankly, you don't like the arrangement and ask her to move him?"

George waited a moment before replying, turning the matter over in his mind. "Oh, I don't know," he said slowly. "I like talking to him, in a way.—I like to hear what other people think."

All that day George remembered the new ideas that Charlie had put in his head and thought of arguments to prove their unsoundness. Toward closing time, he found himself looking forward to talking with Charlie again, and after supper that night they took up their conversation where they had left off the night before.

"You never saw such a lot of dumb-bells as there are at the Excelsior," said Charlie. "All they think about is going to the movies, and all they read is the Official Railway Guide and the Consolidated Freight Classification Tariff. Mr. Whitfield, he's the boss, has a picture of his wife and three kids on his desk. They look like they'd just stuffed themselves with roast beef and mashed potatoes and were ready to go to sleep for the winter. That'll give you some idea of *him*, I guess!"

"Why what's wrong with having a picture of your family on your desk?" asked George in surprise.

Charlie shook his head: "If you don't see for yourself, there's no sense in me trying to tell you."

George kept turning the matter over in his slow mind. "I'm damned if I see anything wrong with that; I think it's a very nice thing to do."

"All right!" said Charlie. "All right!—Have it your own way!" . . .

The arguments continued nightly. George thought them very stimulating and looked forward more and more to his evenings with Charlie. As the weeks went by the boys fell into the habit of taking long walks at night before going to bed. Often these walks took them along the river front and through the poorer sections of the town. At such times Charlie would stare with distaste at the unpainted shacks huddling together beside the railroad tracks and a strange look would come into his eyes. "A few years from now and this sort of thing will be impossible," he would say. "All this filth and disease and unhappiness will be wiped out then . . ."

"I know.—I know—" said George patiently . . . "But what can you do about it? How can you improve it?"

"The State," began Charlie in an excited voice . . . "someday the State—"

"Now, Charlie," said George; "don't start about the State again. Don't start that all over." He began to laugh good naturedly, trying to elbow Charlie off into the gutter. But Charlie grabbed his arms and the two boys struggled, laughingly, on the brink of the shallow ditch. "It stands to reason everybody can't be wrong about things except you," said George . . .

"All right!—All right!" said Charlie. "Have it your own way."

The winter passed rapidly. Then one day Charlie lost his job. Some

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of the things he had said got back to Mr. Whitfield, and Mr. Whitfield had him up on the carpet. Charlie was contemptuous and defiant. "Sure I said it!" he answered. "I said there ought to be a law against you working children in the mills.—Sure I said it!—And I'll say it again!" . . . Then he launched into a long speech in which capitalism, injustice and his government of the future were inextricably mixed. Mr. Whitfield sat in amazement, staring at him, his lips opening and shutting without making any sound. His face was white with anger and it was only by remembering what Christ would do, if confronted by a similar situation, that he prevented himself from striking Charlie across his insolent, immature face. Finally Mr. Whitfield's lips were able to form words. Then suddenly he lost control of himself and began to shout: "Get out of my office you—you God damned little anarchist!—Get out!—We don't want people like you in our organization!" . . .

Charlie repeated the whole conversation to George that night, and George shook his head helplessly. "You just can't get away with that sort of thing: you can't go around saying what you really think. People won't stand for it. You ought to know that, by this time, Charlie."

A passionate look came into Charlie's eyes. "I'll say what I think just as long as there is injustice in the world!" he said. He walked to the window and began lowering and raising the shade. Then he spoke quietly in a voice from which all arrogance had gone: "I can't bear the sight of people living in unhappiness and ignorance. I don't ask anything for myself, George: I haven't got an axe to grind. I don't even care what happens to me afterwards . . . Of course what I think and what I say may not make any difference, one way or the other, but, by God! I'm going to keep thinking and talking and nobody can stop me!" Then Charlie turned abruptly and began packing his trunk. At that moment a peculiar feeling came over George. He had begun, suddenly, to see Charlie from a new angle. There was a curious tightness in his breast and throat. He wanted to say something that would make Charlie realize his changed viewpoint. He walked over and took him by the arms. "Charlie—" he began. But Charlie stopped him. "All right, you damned old capitalist!" he said laughingly; "go ahead! Tell me I'm a fool.—I don't care. Have it your own way!" . . .

Suddenly he shoved George on the bed and began beating him with a pillow. The boys shouted with laughter. They rolled across the bed and on to the floor and began pummeling each other.

The door opened and Mrs. Maddern entered. "This is no time to be skylarking, Charlie," she said sadly. "Haven't you any sense of

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responsibility at all?—I'm sure I don't know what your poor mother is going to say when I tell her you're in trouble again." The boys arose and began straightening their clothes, self-conscious and somewhat ashamed at their outburst of animal spirits.

"Well, crying won't do any good," said Charlie. Mrs. Maddern shook her head and sighed, the jet ornaments on her bosom heaving up and down to the rhythm of her emotion. "What are you going to do now?" she asked.

"I don't know, exactly," said Charlie; "but I'm going some place where people have a little intelligence, you can be sure of that!"

"Poor Charlie!" said Mrs. Maddern. Then she began to laugh, in spite of herself, at his absurdity.

After Charlie had gone, George found time hanging heavily on his hands. He took up his course in Business Administration again, but he could not interest himself in it. He felt ill at ease and dissatisfied. He found himself thinking about Charlie almost constantly and wondering what Charlie would do or say under certain conditions. In reading editorials or listening to political speeches, he would often think: "That's very well put, and it sounds all right, if you don't know, but I'll bet Charlie Banks could shoot his argument full of holes in about two minutes." He recalled some of the books from which Charlie used to quote and one day he took out a library card and commenced going there regularly, bringing home armfuls of books on abstruse subjects which he read patiently two or three times, and which he did not entirely understand.

One day he asked Isabel Leary for a date. There was an excursion down the bay that night and Isabel suggested that they go. The moon was bright and the boat slipped through the water, leaving in its path long angles of yellow foam. Suddenly George had a sense of desolation that almost overwhelmed him. He put his arm around Isabel's waist and drew her to him, and Isabel shivered and lay eagerly in his arms. Later he tried to talk about Charlie and his ideal city, but Isabel heard little that he said. She lay quietly and planned her wedding.

After his marriage the months slipped by placidly for George, one so precisely like the next that he scarcely realized how quickly they were going. He had made it a point to call on Mrs. Maddern every Sunday afternoon, and she received him in her tiny, over-furnished parlor. Mrs. Maddern had never accepted the modern style in dress. For Sundays she still wore a black silk costume that smelled of camphor, with a high collar, reinforced by whale-bone, and a skirt that touched the floor. She

would sit in her rocking-chair and stretch her shapeless legs to the fire and at such times George could see the pucker across her ankles that indicated the terminus of her woolen drawers. During the afternoon Mrs. Maddern would serve fruit-cake and elder blossom wine. She would tell George about her latest symptoms and the difficulties of running a boarding house for unappreciative people and George, in turn, talked about Isabel, who was expecting her second baby shortly. But they both knew that Charlie Banks was the bond that held them together and in the end their conversation invariably turned to him.

"I don't know where he gets his crazy ideas, I'm sure," she would say, "but even as a little boy he was like that. I remember one summer when he was about ten years old: There was scarlet fever in Reedyville that year and my sister sent him down to visit me until it died down. Mr. Maddern was alive in those days. He took a liking to the boy and was always giving him money to spend. Charlie wanted a catcher's mask and glove and he was saving to buy them. Well, after a time he had enough money saved up and Mr. Maddern and I took him down town to buy it, but as we passed the square, he saw an old blind man who was playing a mouth-organ and, before we could stop him, Charlie took his money and put it in the beggar's cup. Mr. Maddern was really provoked with him that time, I remember."

George leaned forward eagerly. "That sounds just like Charlie," he exclaimed. Then, after a moment, he added somewhat self-consciously. "You know, Mrs. Maddern, we didn't really appreciate Charlie when he was here, but I've been reading and thinking a lot since he left and the more I do, the more I keep wondering why we are here on earth.—Where are we going? What are we working and struggling for, anyway? . . ."

"It's not for us to think about those things, George."

George continued: "You and I don't matter. We live our lives and die and it doesn't make much difference one way or the other. But people like Charlie are different; they shove the world along and make it a better place to live in."

"Well, I don't know," said Mrs. Maddern doubtfully. "All I ask of Charlie is that he act like everybody else. I hate to say it, but it has always seemed a little common, to me, for a person to be always talking about poor people and injustice." She sighed deeply, the jet ornaments on her bosom moving upward and reflecting the firelight. George looked at her quickly. Then he realized, in a flash, that Mrs. Maddern, of late, had begun to irritate him. "She doesn't understand Charlie at all," he

thought. "She hasn't got the slightest idea of what Charlie is struggling for. . . ."

The next Sunday afternoon he did not go to see her, and finally his visits ceased altogether. Mrs. Maddern was hurt at his neglect. She said she wanted to apologize if she had done anything to offend him, but George said it wasn't that at all; he was going to the library on Sunday afternoons now, and that took up most of his time. Isabel found these studious habits exasperating, but, on the whole, she was satisfied with the choice she had made. George was a good husband and a good father and he provided for her and their children adequately. He had been promoted three times since their marriage and he was now head of the auditing department, a substantial position, Isabel felt, for a man only thirty-five years old.

Then one morning Charlie Banks returned. George was overjoyed at seeing his friend again, but his first impression was that Charlie looked sick and down and out. There was a long scar on his cheek, another across his forehead, and the bridge of his nose had been flattened. He had a whipped, hang-dog expression, and he could not look any one in the eye. They sat in silence for a few minutes, thinking of the past.

Finally Charlie spoke: "I guess I might as well tell you, and get it over with. Then if you don't want to know me any longer, just say so." He lowered his eyes, as if ashamed of the confession he was to make.

"I won't feel that way, no matter what you tell me," said George.

Charlie spoke rapidly. "Don't be too sure about that. Wait till I tell you; I've been in the penitentiary for the past ten years."

George reached out and touched his arm. "That doesn't make any difference to me, and you know it."

Charlie turned his head away, overcome by emotion. "I was innocent! . . . I swear to Christ I was innocent!" His voice was low, but it was trembling. George came over to him and caught him by the shoulders. "There now, Charlie," he said.—"There now, kid!"

But Charlie did not even hear him. His hands were locked together and he moved about in his chair . . . "They wouldn't let me sleep. They kept shoving me around and calling me filthy names.—But I hadn't thrown that bomb, and I wouldn't say I had . . . They twisted my arms and beat me with nightsticks. Then a big cop knocked me down and commenced kicking me in the ribs and in the face . . . I couldn't stand it any longer . . . They made me say I did it, do you understand? They made me say it!" Charlie began to tremble violently. He put his head down upon the desk and cried silently, his thin shoulders jerking back and forth. "Don't

think about it any more," said George "Don't think about it, Charlie. It's all past and done now . . ."

"I want to start all over," said Charlie. "I've learned my lesson, and all I want now is another chance. I guess I got what was coming to me.—I'll mow lawns. I'll carry out slops. I'll do anything." His voice had become humble and his manner cringing.

"Don't talk like that!" said George sharply.

Charlie began to laugh. When he laughed the scar on his face reddened and gave him an unpleasant expression. "What's wrong with that sort of talk?" he asked.

That night George told Isabel about Charlie's return. He thought it would be nice to have him over for Sunday dinner. Isabel did not like Charlie Banks: she felt that he had imposed on George and that he had been a bad influence in his life, but she consented, finally. She felt it was not fair to deprive her husband of Charlie's friendship, if it meant so much to him.

Charlie arrived promptly at noon. He was very pleasant and self-effacing, and he made a particular effort to be agreeable to Isabel, complimenting her on her cooking and admiring her home. Isabel was delighted with him. She talked on and on about the small gossip of the neighborhood and the radio programs she was interested in. She talked of the children, repeating all the bright things they had said, and Charlie listened eagerly to the details of her placid, uneventful life.

It was late afternoon when he rose to leave. George rose also. He said he would go with him as far as the drug store and buy a cigar. After the men had walked in silence for a few minutes, George said timidly: "You don't know how I missed you when you were gone. I didn't have anybody to talk to."

"Is that right," said Charlie in a matter of fact voice.

George laughed in a self-deprecatory way. "I often think what a fool I must have seemed in the old days.—I don't see how you put up with me, Charlie!—But I've been reading and studying since I saw you. I think we have more in common now."

Charlie did not answer, but an expression of fear came over his face as George continued earnestly: "Do you remember you once said life didn't have any meaning for a man with courage enough to look at the facts? . . . And I laughed and made fun of you for saying it?—Well, I understand, now, what you meant. It hasn't any significance at all." He paused a moment, a puzzled expression on his round, stupid face.

"What's it all about, Charlie? Where are we going? What do we get out of it? . . ."

Charlie shrugged his shoulders, as if annoyed at George's simplicity. Then he began to laugh harshly, the scar on his face turning red. "You've got no kick coming. You've got a good job and a good home, haven't you? What else do you expect?"

George looked at him in surprise. "You've changed, Charlie," he said mildly. "You're not at all like you used to be." They had reached the drug store and Charlie stood still on the sidewalk. It was January and dusk came early. Behind them the sun was low in the sky, and, as they stood there, the lights in the drug store were turned on.

"Sure I've changed," said Charlie; "I've got wise to myself." The lights from the store cut a dim triangle through the late afternoon and fell across the faces of the men. There was a purple shadow where the bridge of Charlie's nose had once been . . . "Do you think I was sent to jail because anybody believed I was really guilty?" continued Charlie. "If you do, get that idea out of your head.—I was on the wrong side of the fence, that's all! . . . Well, from now on I'm playing ball with the winning team."

George said: "Charlie!—Charlie! . . . Don't talk like that!" Charlie was surprised at the emotion in his voice. "Say, what's the matter with you, anyway?" he asked. Then he began to laugh. "You've changed some yourself. I always thought of you as being on the right side along with the people that sent me up."

George closed his eyes, but he did not answer.

"While I was in jail," Charlie continued, "I kept thinking about you. I said to myself a thousand times: 'George Owens has the right idea. He tried to tell me what a fool I was and where I was headed, but I wouldn't listen to him.—Oh no! I thought I knew it all!'"

"Don't throw that up to me now," said George quietly, "I don't think that way any more." Then he added: "There's so much sadness and injustice in the world. There are so many things that ought to be remedied."

"All right," said Charlie, "you remedy them. You try it for awhile."

George spoke earnestly: "I can't stand up to people, and you know it. I don't think quickly, the way you do, and when I try to express my views, I get confused and begin to stammer. You're the man to do it, Charlie.—You can't go back on me now . . ."

Suddenly Charlie's fists clenched, his lips drew back from his teeth and a look of mingled hatred and cunning came into his eyes. "I'm play-

ing ball with the winning team!" he repeated stubbornly. At that moment George knew that he no longer had anything in common with Charlie Banks. He turned without a word and walked away.

But Charlie was coming behind him, running sidewise and catching at the sleeve of his coat. His face was frightened now, and his manner cringing. "Don't get sore at me, George," he pleaded. "You're the only friend I've got in the world.—Don't get sore at me." George stood still again and leaned against a telephone pole. Charlie caught the lapels of his coat with both hands and stared down at the pavement. "You won't tell anybody I was in jail, will you, George? . . . You wouldn't do a dirty thing like that, would you?"

"I won't tell anybody," said George.

"I don't want the cops here to know I got a record," said Charlie. "You don't know what they can do to you.—You don't understand."

"I won't tell anybody."

Charlie began to tremble. "I don't ask much," he said. "All I want is a job and a chance to start all over again.—That's not being unreasonable, is it? That's not asking much . . ."

"No," said George. "That's not asking much."

Quietly he removed Charlie's hands, turned and walked toward his home. When he arrived, Isabel was giving the children their supper. She called brightly from the kitchen: "I'll have to apologize for what I said about your friend, Mr. Banks. I've never seen such an improvement in anybody in my life." George looked at her in amazement, but he realized she was quite serious . . . "How stupid Isabel is," he thought; "how stupid everything is!" Then he walked onto the porch and sat on the steps. He had forgotten his cigar, after all, but he got out his pipe and began filling it slowly.

The sun had set and there was a fine, purple haze in the air. Far away he heard the whistle of a steamer coming up the channel and the steady mooring of the tugs that accompanied her. He lit his pipe carefully, shielding the flame with his palm. A breeze was blowing up from the Gulf, bringing with it a smell of salt air, tar and ripening bananas. He remembered a twilight, years ago, when he and Charlie, tired from one of their walks, had sat on a bale of cotton and watched the yellow river flow into the bay. The scene came back to him vividly: Someone had been burning marsh grass, that time, and the glare was reflected in the sky and in the shallow bayous to the east. He remembered, also, the sound of a concertina, muted and indistinct, from a Spanish boat anchored in the stream, and how clumps of dead hyacinths, their purple blossoms

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soaked with oil, kept floating past . . . Then Charlie had begun talking of his city of the future where everyone lived together in understanding and love and where hunger, hatred and unhappiness were not known. Again he saw the look of rapt eagerness in Charlie's eyes, and the way he kept moving his hands back and forth, as if he were writing words on the air . . . Then he, George, had risen and come over to him: "What you say sounds all right, Charlie," he had said, "but it's not practical. . . Everybody can't be wrong but you."

Inside Isabel was putting the children to bed, humming a tune. Presently she came to the door. "Put on your overcoat, George," she said; "you'll take cold in the night air." George nodded his head.

"All right," he said; . . . "all right."

Then he knocked out his pipe and sat staring at his hands . . . "Maybe if I'd encouraged Charlie, and not laughed at him.—Maybe if I'd done that . . ." Then a strange, excited feeling came over him and he stood upright, trembling. There was something profound that he wanted to say, and for a moment he felt that he was about to put in one sentence all the beauty and all the brutality of the world, but in the end words eluded him, and he leaned against a post, tired and deflated.

Isabel was speaking to him again from the living room: "George! Put on your coat if you're going to sit out there.—You'll take cold . . ."

But he did not answer his wife this time. He walked to the door and stood there irresolute, his hand fumbling for the knob, a puzzled expression on his round, child-like face. "I wish I'd never met Charlie Banks!" he said. Then he turned, entered his comfortable house, and closed the door behind him.



SYMBOL

Louis Adamic

He was a slight, colorless fellow, twenty-five or so, with a timorous, apologetic manner. His face was clean-shaven, with a faint chin, thin, pale lips, a slender medium-sized nose, and gray-blue eyes that looked at one blinkingly, half scared. His darkish hair was thin, trimmed and combed just-so. He dressed neatly. His voice was a trifle shrill, and when he spoke, he smiled shyly, revealing part of a gold tooth in a row

of yellowing ones. He gave one the impression of something dingy, inadequate.

I had been seeing him off and on for months in one or the other of the second-hand bookshops in downtown Los Angeles where I killed an occasional afternoon browsing. But at first I had scarcely noticed him. I had heard the booksellers call him Mr Bownes. He was buying a great many books; every time I saw him in the street he had three or four under his arm.

I forgot just how it came about, but one evening Bownes and I exchanged a few words. He made me a little uncomfortable with his shy, wan manner and blinking eyes, but I could not help being interested in him; the books that he was buying were good books as books went; and before long we had another brief talk. He appeared always to be looking for some book. He had booksellers advertise for "items" in publishers' and booksellers' trade journals. Now and then he was all excited about procuring this or that volume. Once I put him on the trail of a certain book that he was eager to get and next time we met he thanked me as if I had done him a stupendous service. The books that he bought were on all sorts of subjects.

One day I asked him how big a library he had.

"Oh, not so big," he answered, embarrassed, blinking his eyes, his thin face flushing with a little color. "I started buying books only three months ago."

Some time later he asked me with a great but fruitless effort at casualness would I have dinner with him. He evidently knew no one in town and was lonely. Los Angeles, I thought to myself, was full of people like that: recently arrived immigrants from the vast plains of the Middle West. I might as well spend an evening with one of them.

During the dinner Bownes lost some of his shyness and, under my urging, began to talk of himself.

He was from Oklahoma, born and raised on a farm. His father died when he was ten. Then his mother tried to run the place, but could not manage it; the farm required a man. She married again, a man who turned out to be a "a brute," as Bownes put it with a thin, futile bitterness in his voice.

"He made me do the hardest work there was before I was fourteen," he said, "and I never was big and strong. Mother was a tiny little woman, always ailing from too much work, too much misery, and exposure. I was too small to hold the plough handles, so he—my step-father—sawed them off; can you imagine? Sometimes I plowed all day long. He

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worked hard himself, but no harder than I did. Often I was too tired to eat and sleep, I worked so hard. That was no way to work a kid, new, was it? . . . Mother used to plead for me, seeing how tired and poor I always looked, but didn't do any good. He always said that hard work would make a man out of me.

"Once I hid away, and when I showed up again he thrashed me. Mother cried, but she couldn't do anything. He almost beat her, too. I would of run away if it wasn't for the fact that I didn't want to leave mother there alone with him. He let me go to school as little as possible: hard work was going to make a man out of me; education was all useless. Can you imagine?

"This went on till I was eighteen. He let me go one year to high-school; there was a good-sized town near our farm. The farm improved, but I was always poor and small. One thing I never could do was eat butter. I don't know why. Mother used to try to make me; she said it would make me grow, but I never could—just couldn't . . ."

II

"The second winter after the war," Bownes went on, "my step-father died of pneumonia, and, man, I was a happy boy! I was going on nineteen.

"Then mother and I ran the farm, but I guess we didn't know how to manage as well as he did, and the place began to go down once more. I guess I wasn't made to be a farmer.

"Mother ailed, and I always had a cold or something, too. We tried to sell the farm and talked about going to California, but couldn't get anybody to buy it. After the war things were pretty bad for the farmers all over the country.

"I liked to read, and I read everything I could lay my hands on whenever I had some time, all kinds, but mostly trash, I guess. I didn't know how to get good stuff.

"Then, two years ago, mother got real sick. Cancer. There was no hope, but of course the doctor and I didn't tell her, and she talked to the last about selling the farm and going with me to California. She heard so much about California sunshine. She just knew that after she got there she'd get well in a jiffy, and I would grow strong, too.

"Then they discovered oil less than half-a-mile from our farm. Prospectors came around our place, but for a year nothing happened.

"Meantime mother died.

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"I didn't know what to do with myself. I felt like leaving everything and go, just go, but neighbors advised me I should hold on to the farm. They figured there was oil all through that part of the country.

"I hated the farm, and spent most of the time reading. Now and then I went to Oklahoma City and bought me a batch of books.

"Then a couple of men came and offered me fifteen thousand dollars for the farm, and said they would also cover the mortgage. I almost dropped dead. I said all right, and in about a week I had a check for fifteen thousand. Since then they struck it rich, and my farm now maybe is worth millions of dollars. I read about it a while back in an oil paper.

"Just think—can you imagine?—I plowed over great pools of oil with short plough handles. But, well, I'm not sorry I sold it. Fifteen thousand was more than I ever expected to have in my life.

"Mother and I had planned to go to California, and now that I could, and she was dead I decided to go there by myself. I had no one in the whole world.

"I was all choked up with feelings when I got to Los Angeles, so that I scarcely felt anything. Anyhow, I knew that ploughing and hard work on the farm and long bitter winters were all things of the past. I was only sorry mother didn't live so that she could of come here, too.

"Of course at the beginning I was a bit lonesome, but then I started to read again and go around the book stores. Lately I discovered the better magazines and literary reviews, and I buy most of the books that are praised. I get a great kick out of buying them, and a few of them I find wonderful reading. Never knew there were so many fine books in the world. Gee, what trash I used to read! Now I take great pride in owning the books I buy.

"I buy a great many old books, too; books that are out of print and often hard to get. I find mention of them in magazines in connection with some new book, and then I spend days going from store to store in Los Angeles and Hollywood and Pasadena till I get it. Sometimes they have to advertise for it, and it takes weeks before a copy turns up. But I guess you know the game . . . "

He said he had no plans for himself. After he had deposited his money in a Los Angeles bank, real-estate and oil-stock salesmen began to call on him, but he was in no hurry to invest. Certainly he would never invest in oil; the game was too crooked.

First he wanted to rest up and improve his health. He was having his teeth fixed and was taking naturopathic treatments which he thought

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were doing him a world of good. He believed that Los Angeles was a grand place indeed.

III

I talked with Bownes frequently thereafter. He developed an acute case of bibliomania. He began to go in for first and signed limited editions of modern American and English authors. He read books on book-collecting and studied bibliographies.

Occasionally he took me to his tiny one-room bungalow on Boyle Heights and showed me his latest acquisitions. He was delighted that some one should take an interest in his books.

The little house was being rapidly filled with them. He had books on shelves, in boxes, stacked high on the floor. There was something very pathetic about it all. He handled the volumes with the naive tenderness common to new victims of bibliomania.

He heard somewhere that book-lovers wrote to authors to autograph their books for them, and so he, too, began to write to literary celebrities, nearly all of whom were prompt to answer that if he forwarded them the books they would be delighted to sign them. Bownes sent them off and then waited eagerly till the postman brought them back. He showed me the authors' notes and their inscriptions in the books, each of which he considered virtually priceless.

It would have been foolish—not to say futile—to urge him to be moderate in his book-buying. I thought he had a right to his particular folly. Besides, as a bibliomaniac he was happier, perhaps, than he had been ever before in his life. He began to look better than when I had first seen him, and his manner took on a suggestion of boldness and self-assurance. At any rate, all this chasing after books and reading them, writings to authors and sending off their works to be autographed, kept him, as he himself put it, out of mischief.

One of the shops that Bownes seemed to patronize oftener than the others was a small, arty place run by a woman named Prudence Bright. She was perhaps in her mid-forties, a person of generous built, kind—, motherly-looking, sweet-smiling. Her husband was an artist of some sort, none too successful; she supported him.

She dealt mostly in rare books and first editions.

In his talks with me, Bownes was enthusiastic about Prudence. She was a very nice woman indeed. By-and-by I began to see that in a subtle way she was enhancing his bibliomania, for which—business being business—one could scarcely blame her. It was not difficult to trace his first-

edition craze to her influence. He had told her his life-story, including the fact, no doubt, that he had come to Los Angeles with nearly fifteen thousand dollars. My acquaintance with Prudence was slight, but sufficient to know that she had listened to Bownes with deep maternal sympathy, which of course was what his frail soul craved most. On Sundays she had him for dinner at her house, and she and her husband entertained him. Mr. Bright, Bownes informed me, was very nice too; and it was a source of much satisfaction to him that two so highly cultured people should accept him as almost their equal.

He bought most of the high-priced books at Prudence's. On an occasion he explained to me that, aside from the cultural interest that he had in books, he was putting his money into first editions as an investment. Mrs. Bright had told him so and so. These rare books increased in value, for more and more people were collecting books. It was a game. There was romance in it, too. It brought one in contact with such splendid people.

IV

For a year and a half Bownes' bibliomania showed no sign of weakening; indeed, it was the strongest part of him. After that period, however, he began occasionally to stay away from the shops for a week or two at a time. I figured that since he had started buying books he must have rid himself of at least ten thousand dollars. Prudence had induced him to buy, in addition to countless modern firsts, several rare Poes and Whitmans, which he showed me in his shack. But although his bank account was gradually being eaten up, book-love still was strong in him, and he came to the bookshops again and bought some more.

Whenever I went to his shack, he loaned me one or more of his books; he said he trusted me with them because I appreciated them; most people were so careless with books.

The little bungalow was being filled with books from floor to ceiling. Some of the less precious ones were in the kitchen and the bathroom. He had a wall-bed, and there was just enough space in the room for him to put it down in the evening. Books, books, everywhere. Even the windows were partly obscured by stacks of volumes of all descriptions.

He thought of getting a larger house where he could have shelves for all his books, but hesitated to move because it would have been a job to haul them. He would have to have a truck. Besides, the bungalow was wooden, and he was afraid of fire.

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"I guess I did go a little too deep into this game," he finally admitted to me.

Then one day he told me that he was down to his last thousand dollars. He would buy no more books. To save money, he began to cook his own meals, and his clothes were getting shiny from too much pressing.

He offered for sale a few of his books, and the booksellers offered him only a fraction of what he had paid for them.

He began to lose the self-assurance that I had noticed in him at an early stage of his book-madness. He became shyer and more inadequate-appearing than even when I had first met him two years before. He had little to say. He was ill-looking. His breath was offensive. Booksellers wondered about him. I would not see him for weeks at a time.

I had a book of his, and one afternoon I went to see him and return it. He was ill with stomach trouble, as he told me. The wall-bed was down, and he lay close to the floor, amidst his three or four thousand books. The books were not as neatly stacked as I had last seen them. Dust covered them. On one of the piles was a soiled towel, on another a bottle of yellow medicine and a teaspoon.

Bownes was glad to see me. He said that he had meant to send me a note, but didn't want to bother me. There was something terribly pathetic about him.

"I'm through with books. Wish I never saw them," he was saying. "Then probably I wouldn't of known what a sad case I am. I've been thinking a great deal the last few weeks. Those books are supposed to contain most of the wit and wisdom of the times; what good are they to me? I haven't opened one ever since I've been sick. But I thought a lot about myself. . . Funny. The other day it occurred to me that I am a symbol. Some time ago I heard someone argue in a book-store downtown that civilization was sick, pale and rotten; that all the wise men in the world can't help it. Well, that's me: I'm the symbol of that sick civilization. Here I am among thousands of good books, and there is no hope for me. See what I mean?"

He was rather incoherent, but I thought I knew what he meant. I asked him what was the matter with him.

"Everything. I'm nothing. There's nothing in me. I wore myself out working in the fields, and there was oil underground. I read some of these books, perhaps a thousand of them, and I realized there were worlds into which I can never enter. I was born and raised wrong. I read about love and romance. There's nothing in me. I never——"

He fell silent. To change the subject, I asked who was taking care

of him. He said that his doctor was sending a nurse to see him three times a day.

Then he began to talk about the idea that he and these gorgeous books around him formed a symbol of modern civilization. He could not express himself clearly on the matter, but evidently was proud of having hit upon the idea.

Would I do him a favor? Then he gave me a catalogue of his books which he had prepared some time before he had fallen ill; it was not a complete list, he said, but almost so; and he requested me to go to some of the booksellers and see how much they would be willing to pay him for them. They were all in good condition. He wanted to get rid of the books; all of them; had no use for a single one of them; and, besides, he needed money. His doctor wanted him to go to a sanitarium in San Diego.

"They can't do me any good there, except temporarily in a limited way," he said, "but I guess I better go."

V

I complied with his request, and a few days later returned to him with the bookseller who made the highest offer, which was about one-third of what Bownes had paid for the lot.

Bownes, on this occasion, was extremely taciturn. For a moment I almost resented his manner. He scarcely returned my hello and would not look at either the bookseller or me.

"All right," he said, "bring a truck tomorrow morning and take 'em away!" There was a peculiar shrill huskiness in his voice.

Then he turned away and covered up his head. I thought he was going daft or something. He seemed to be laughing under the covers.

All that the bookseller and I could do was leave him alone.

The nurse who visited him that evening thought that he was acting queer. (This and some of the ensuing details I learned or surmised subsequently). Later in the evening he got up and went to a grocery-store nearby and bought a gallon can of coal-oil.

He poured the oil over the books and drenched his own clothes with it.

Then he lighted a match and threw it on the books. I believe he had meant to burn himself to death, but then got scared and, before the blaze touched him, broke out through the door.

The fire department came, but it was too late. The bungalow and all the books were destroyed.

"I'm a symbol!" cried Bownes. "That's a symbol—the house burning full of books. Great books—everything burning."

He laughed insanely.

Two men held him until the ambulance came.

"I'm a symbol—civilization destroying itself."

They took him to the psychopathic ward at the City Hospital. They kept him there several weeks. Some days he raved in a futile way from morning till evening about being a symbol.

Then he seemed to become normal again. They turned him loose.

He was seen walking in downtown Los Angeles—a thin, pathetic figure, shadow-like.

One day an automobile struck him at a crossing. He had walked right into it, perhaps unintentionally.

He died on the pavement, waiting for the ambulance.



WHITE MULE

William Carlos Williams

CHAPTER VII

CONFLICT

Oscar picked her up and placed her upon his left thigh with her two feet sticking out in front of her and did up her buttons: And there you are.

The child looked up at him and smiled. Where do you sleep? she said.

Where do I sleep? Well, by God, Annie, that's a good one. Where do I sleep? Why, on my head, of course. Where do you sleep, old girl? Tell me that. But the child just kept looking up fascinated at him where she sat sidewise on his lap. Can I stay here? And so they talked together while Gurlie was making the coffee in the kitchen.

And now I'm going to show you something nice, said the man. But first, standing with the little girl between his hands he began raising her up as if he were going to toss her into the air. *Ein. Zwei.* And a half! and he didn't toss her after all. Then again. *Ein. Zwei.* And this time at, *Drei*—he gave her a full toss so that she flew up, her arms spread wide, her legs out, high into the air, looking down at him still, unafraid, into his eyes—and he caught her under the armpits, easily breaking her fall. And again. And again. Until she began to laugh drunkenly and he saying, Whoops! Whoops! every time and, There she goes!

Well, what's this? suddenly broke in a voice from the doorway. And there stood a tall, thin woman in street clothes and a hat, looking in from beside the curtains. Oscar put the child down. Both stood there looking at the woman. Then they heard Gurlie coming.

My! how did you get in?

Well, if you leave your front door open—

Silly, we always leave it open, said Gurlie. Don't you know who this is? This is Oscar, Joe's brother. You've often heard us speak of him. This is my sister, Hilda.

Oh you mean—? I'm very pleased to meet you, said Hilda coming forward.

Same here, said Oscar taking her hand.

Ouch! said Hilda. Ha, ha, said Oscar, did I squeeze it too tight? Ooo! said Hilda again, what hands!

Gurlie brought out a little table and they had coffee and cakes. Annie sat on the man's knee and ate what she pleased in spite of the protests of the women. She even had some coffee.

Tell you what we'll do, said Oscar at last. I'm feeling good. Let's have a party tonight.

What sort of a party? said Gurlie.

Let's give Joe a surprise. Will you cook it if I bring it in? Bring what in? said Gurlie. Everything. What time is it now? Four o'clock. In half an hour. *Aufwiedersehen!* and he was on his way, kissing Annie in departing and bending his head again at the curtains as he went through. She ran to the window to see him go running down the front steps.

And that is Joe's brother! said Hilda catching her breath after the cyclone had departed.

Yes, said Gurlie. Now I'll have to work.

Is that the one?—

Yes. Here, help me take out these things.

What did he do? persisted the thin auntie. He ran off with the general's wife? Gurlie laughed heartily. His captain's wife, said she, not the general's. Oh, said Hilda, and so he had to come to America. That is very romantic.

A lazy, good for nothing, replied Gurlie,—coming like this in the middle of the afternoon to disturb everybody.

Joe should have some of his light heartedness, began Hilda. But Gurlie broke in on her. See here! she said, don't you say anything against my husband.

Why I never said anything against Joe, replied the thin auntie.

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Yes you did, came back Gurlie. That one can run away, with a married woman. And you think that's fine, you think that's wonderful! Foolish people like you. But his brother had to work, from the time he was a little boy, and bring up the whole pack of them. No, no, you can't say anything against Joe. Look out for that in your hand. She stopped, listening, both listened. And sure enough the baby's thin cry could be heard coming fitfully from the back of the house.

Here, said Gurlie, when they reached the kitchen, you can make good cakes. There's all you need—somewhere in there. Make a cake. I don't know what you want, replied Hilda. A cake, said Gurlie, any kind. There's flour, butter. What do you need? Here are three oranges. Make an orange cake. All right, said the thin auntie, but it's only four o'clock.

Take this, said Gurlie handing her an apron. Roll up your sleeves. And before she knew much more about it Hilda was hard at it mixing up a cake batter while Gurlie was prodding the range with broad, skillful strokes until she had a roaring fire there, her hands were grimy and her blonde hair was in wisps flying about her forehead and temples.

Vinie! she called and the lanky colored girl came in with the baby on her arm and Annie traipsing after her. Come here, put down that baby. Yas 'm. Take the things off those tubs. Yas 'm. And the baby having been propped up in a high, rolling chair with a pillow, was given a wooden spoon to play with. Annie wanted it and deliberately pulled it out of the baby's grip tho' the mite, who had been trying to suck it, held on with might and main—yet it was taken from her.

Waaaa! she yelled.

Then the door bell rang. Vinie went. And with a great clatter in came Oscar, a case of beer on his left shoulder and a bushel basket heaped with small packages, unwrapped vegetables and a bottle, in the crook of his right arm. Here we are, he called out. I rang the bell with my elbow. Couldn't push the door open.

Oh! shouted the ladies in amazement. Oscar! what have you done? But with that case of beer on your shoulder that way, you shouldn't—

Who? laughed the man.

But you've bought too much. What is this?

Everything. Then he saw the baby and stopped. The baby! said he. And he dropped everything to the floor and went over at once to the chair where little Flossie was still sobbing, broken-hearted, over the loss of her spoon. Then he turned seriously to Gurlie: Is she all right? Of course she's all right. Who's taking care of her? He turned to Vinie

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who backed off with a scared expression to her face. She's too thin. Why don't you feed her?

Leave the child alone and mind your own business, said Gurlie. We have work to do if we're going to cook all that stuff you've brought in. I think you're crazy—for four people.

And there was Annie crowding in—or trying to—between him and the baby, looking up at him with big, reproachful eyes. Let's see what they gave us, he said.

Gurlie started to laugh in spite of herself. And who's going to fix that chicken? Me I suppose.

Watch someone as *can* fix a chicken, he replied. And to Vinie's intense amusement, threw off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, tucked a kitchen towel around his waist—he wore no vest—and the game was on.

But not until he had opened up three bottles of beer, filled three glasses—and: What about the gal? he said, turning to Vinie. But Gurlie shook her head. No! at Vinie behind his back. No, not for her, said Gurlie, she doesn't like it. So Vinie looked down and sucking in her lips tried not to laugh.

Here's to success! said Oscar, come on Annie, take a sip. Success! And the ladies said the same. And some meat on your bones, Babes! He leaned down to the baby. *Proes't!* And he drank the glass down as if in one swallow to the baby's health and filled up another.

The time flew, as did their fingers. Soon the kitchen was filled with delicious smells. Whee! said Gurlie, open those windows at the top.

And how old were you when you were in the German army? asked the thin auntie.

Eighteen, said the man, in the Kaiser's Dragoon Guards, not a man among us under six feet in his stockings—

I want to know all about it. It is very romantic, said Hilda. Was she very beautiful?

Oscar gave Gurlie a broad wink: *Wunderschöne!* It was love at first sight.

And then? said Hilda eagerly.

And then, when it was too late, I found she was my captain's wife. Nonsense, said Gurlie. You must have known who she was.

No, no, said Hilda, such things do happen. But you do not understand, you are not romantic, she concluded addressing her sister.

On my soul I didn't, said Oscar melodramatically. I thought she was free. What could I do when I found otherwise—?

But what were you doing when they found you?

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There we were, continued Oscar. It was a dark moonlight night. I had climbed from the back window of the *caserna*, dropped twenty feet to the ground—

I don't believe a word of it, said Gurlie.

Why yes, said the thin auntie. That is how those things happen. I believe in love—

Whoops, said Gurlie. I'll bet you do. Wait till you try it. I'll bet she saw he was a nice boy and took him by the ear—

But did you—did you? Did they catch you? continued Hilda ignoring her sister.

No, not exactly, said Oscar, a little sobered in spite of himself. Not exactly. Or else I wouldn't be here. Well, here's to the living. And he downed another glass of beer. Anyhow, she was fine woman.

The baby was crying again. Annie had pushed her sister's chair far over, little by little, while they were talking, against the wall with her face the other way.

Look, said Gurlie, laughing, Look what she's done. Vinie, come here.

But Vinie who had been setting the table in the other room frowned heavily at the older child as she brought the baby, still crying, around to face the room again.

Take her out, said Gurlie, she cries too much.

No, said Oscar, let her stay. They like to cry. That's their profession. The first thing they take us is crying. And with that the baby stopped at once and a broad, sunny grin spread over her features all running-wet with tears—the toothless grin of a five month's old baby—while she snuggled her face down shyly into her pillow having attracted attention to herself at last.

Why don't you get married, you like babies so much, said Hilda.

It's bad luck, said the ex-cavalryman. I once heard of a man who did it—and his wife lived to be a hundred.

Well look out, you smart guys, began Gurlie. But she suddenly changed her mind. What time is it? Look and see, Vinie.

Ten minutes past six, Ma'm.

Then a wild scramble ensued. Why, the baby should be fed and asleep by this time. But she was jabbering loudly and gaily along with the others and banging the chair with the spoon. Let her stay up, said Oscar. I'll have to clean myself up, said Hilda. Chairs were rushed about. Then, as it approached six-thirty—all traces of excitement were ironed out, not an unusual sound or sight prevailed, just the smell of the

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roast chicken, and—the sound of a key could be heard in the front door. It was Joe.

Hellooo! he called out. No answer. Hey! he said then, Where is everybody?

Oh, is it you, said Gurlie coming forward. Then she lost control a little, took him by both cheeks, pinching him hard with her strong hands and kissed him vigorously all over the face. It's me darlint, she said, my little Dutchie.

Leave me alone, he protested harshly. What's the matter with you. You've been drinking. Get out of here.

And with that Oscar roared and Hilda rushed forward into the hall. Hello Joe!

What's this! What's this! said Joe.

It's a party, said Gurlie, hilarious now. For what? said Joe. A party? For us! said Gurlie. It's Oscar's treat. That's good, said Joe. I suppose he has lots of money. Well, how are you? Glad you came. Let's go into the other room.

The dinner was tremendous. Skol! said Gurlie holding a glass up to her husband's nose. Skol! Come on, you. Drink.

Joe, though, somehow couldn't get himself up to the mood of the others and gradually, as the effect of the beer wore off and they had eaten more and more, they grew soberer and soberer. Hilda had let her head fall on Oscar's shoulder and he had placed his arm around her gallantly. Vinie was a little bored. The baby had been put to sleep earlier and Annie who had been kneeling on a leather pillow behind Oscar's chair ended by going to sleep there also.

Why did you say you came east? said Joe to his brother finally. Have one of these nickel cigars, he added, they're good. No thanks, replied Oscar. I'm going to fill up the old pipe in a minute. I just felt like it, so I came.

Good, said Joe, That's the way to do things. Just quit, eh?

Oh, it must be wonderful to be a man, commented Hilda drowsily.

Yes, just stepped out, said Oscar, for a little vacation.

Are the meat packers pretty well organized these days? asked the older brother.

Stop it, said Gurlie. What's the matter with you. Skol! Oscar. He's too serious.

Well, somebody has to be.

What's happened to you, Joe? said his brother. You were always a hard worker, but—

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Shame on you, said his wife, This is no time for such talk. Oh, she said rising, I know where there's something in the pantry. And you're going to drink it, she threatened her husband.

Yes, I wondered where you were hiding it, replied he.

All right, she came back at him, Why don't you let yourself go then.

Go on, said Joe, get out of here. Can't a man talk to his own brother? Are you a member of their union? he continued addressing Oscar.

Sure I am. Please, said Hilda, Don't quarrel. Joe gave her a look and laughed in spite of himself. Here we are, said Gurlie, coming in with a half bottle of brandy. She poured out a small glassful and held it to her husband's lips: Drink! she said, Drink! I'll drink it, he replied drawing back. Give it to me. He took it and smelled it. What's this? Let me see the bottle. Oh, you make me tired, she answered him. It's poison! Can't you see it written here? It's poison, I tell you. That's why I gave it to you. Forget it.

All right, he said. I want to see it just the same. *Was der bauer nicht kennt das frist er nicht.*

What's the matter, Joe, something on your mind? asked Oscar.

Why should there be? Ain't I married?

What do you mean by that, came back his wife swiftly.

Plenty, he grinned at her, frowning to keep himself from breaking into a laugh.

Look here, young man, she went on. If it wasn't for me you'd be in the soup. I'm the one that stands behind you. I'm the one. Isn't it so? Don't you know it down in your heart? Don't you know it? Tell me. Don't you know that I'm the one that makes you get anywhere?

Well, where are we getting to? That's what I'd like to know. The poor house, as far as I can see.

Bah, bah, bah, bah! she got up and tousled his head in her rough, caressing manner. I'll bet my little Dutchie against the world—raising her glass in a powerful gesture.

Hoch, hoch!

You have, and how I know it, said Joe.

What do you mean by that?

What can I mean?

Look here, young man. If you don't think you're lucky to have me pushing you where you don't want to go yourself—

You'll see! she continued ignoring his answer. You'll see. You have everything—but the courage. And I have that. You wait and see.

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Gedul' bring' Rosen! I hope so, was Joe's rejoinder before Oscar broke in with—

You take too much on your own shoulders, Joe.

Well, it's lucky someone does.

That's right, put in Gurlie. Listen to your brother. He knows how to live.

No, it isn't that, Oscar answered quickly, But Joe's too good. Gott! what difference does it make whether you're dead or alive—in the end, I mean—as far as the world is concerned! You've got to think of yourself more. This idea of thinking you've got to take the whole business on your own shoulders—I've noticed it's usually you little fellahs, who get the weight of the world on your necks. While you're studying your latins and getting your scholarships—

Yes, exactly, said Gurlie defensively.

—why, continued Oscar, we're out—

Yes, said Hilda.

—living, concluded the ex-dragon.

Ha, ha, said Joe, you're right. But what exactly he meant by his laughter it would be hard to say.

This is the end. We're living in the last times. Read the Bible, broke in Gurlie.

It's the women coming into business that's doing it, said Joe ignoring her. They're too damned lazy to stay home and take care of their own work. They want to put men out to show how smart they can be, to make money to fix their hair and paint their faces with—

Nonsense, answered Gurlie, quietly. Give us enough money and we are satisfied. Whoop la! she shouted then, *La de da dee, da dee, da dee!*

Na na, na na! Can't you keep quite for a minute. Can't you let us talk. No, you are too serious, said his wife. You're drunk, he replied. Who's drunk? Not I. But you ought to be, that's what's the matter with you. You need it. Who's going to give us a toast?

I will, said her husband suddenly, and paused. Down with the unions, he cried out, standing. Come on, drink it.

There was absolute silence for a minute. Nobody drank but Joe who finished his glass. Let's have another, he added, holding his glass out toward the wife. What's the matter? Are you having trouble down at the shop? said she shrewdly and not filling his glass as he had asked her to. Not a trouble in the world. Come on, give me something to drink.

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Down with the unions! And he laughed his chuckling, half mocking, adult laughter. Come on, all of you. Drink up.

All right, said Oscar. Down with the unions. And down went his dram.

Now then, tear up your card, said Joe, with a malicious twinkle in his eye.

Right you are, replied Oscar, reaching into his pocket. He had his eye fixed on his older brother.

No, said Gurlie, stopping him. Papa, what's the matter with you? Are you crazy?

Well, are you going to let me talk then?

Not when you talk that way.

All right then, forget it. To hell with the politicians. Vote for Cleveland. *Hoch sol er leben, hoch sol er leben! Drei mal Hoch.* Is this all you've got to drink?

My God Joe! said his brother, I've been hoping to see you lit all my young life. Gurlie! The champagne!

Whee pee! I forgot it. And she jumped up and went running out of the room.

Champagne? said Joe.

I love champagne, said Hilda. It makes you feel so—I don't know what.

No, I guess you don't, said Joe.

You're right, said Oscar. That's right. Listen to old Joe, said he to Gurlie returning, he was just saying—

I think you're terrible, said Hilda.

What are you men after, embarrassing my poor sister.

Oscar was working at the neck of the bottle by this time. He didn't try to hold back the cork. Pop went the cork bouncing sharply from the ceiling directly into Hilda's lap. Good luck, good luck, shouted Oscar.

Say Oscar, this is fine, said Joe after a minute. You shouldn't have done it. That must have cost a lot of money. That's fine of you though. We haven't had champagne—How long is it since we had any champagne, Mama?

Oh this is delicious, said Hilda. It reminds me of when I was in Paris—

And here's to your health, all of you, said Oscar. To us all—God help us!

And down with the unions, said Joe laughing. The unions and the politicians—

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Say, is Sis still playing in the *Black Crook*? That's one of the main reason's I came down this time. Sure, she's still in the chorus, said Joe in his usual cryptic manner. Want to go and see her? Yes, said Oscar, I was thinking we might all go down there now—

Yes, yes, broke in Gurlie.

No, not tonight, said Joe. Not me anyhow. I'm sorry. Take the ladies if you like but I've got to go to bed. I've got a big day ahead of me tomorrow.

(*To be continued*).



NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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